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# “Men of Honour and Honesty”: Connections Between Jews and Freemasons in Early America

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# “Men of Honour and Honesty”: Connections Between Jews and Freemasons in Early America

## **Abstract**

This paper is an exploration of the intersections between the Jewish community and Freemasons in early American history, largely during the eighteenth century. Most people don't even realize that there were Jews in America at this point, let alone that many of them were important enough in their community to merit membership in an elite organization like the Freemasons. This paper tries to understand the overlap between these two groups by using an increasingly narrow examination of the Masonic organization. Ultimately, my findings can be summarized by this line from my paper: “although it sounds surprising that many of the early Jews in America were Masons, upon further investigation, it would be more surprising if they weren't.”

## **Keywords**

Jews, Freemasons, eighteenth century, history, america, King David's Lodge, Sublime Lodge of Perfection, Isaac da Costa, Moses Michael Hays, Solomon Bush, Humanities, Michael Zuckerman, Zuckerman, Michael, Mike Zuckerman

## **Disciplines**

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“MEN OF HONOUR AND HONESTY”:  
CONNECTIONS BETWEEN JEWS AND FREEMASONS IN EARLY AMERICA

Sara Arielle Zimmerman

AN HONORS THESIS

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History

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Dr. Thomas Max Safley, Honors Seminar Director

Dr. Beth S. Wenger and Dr. Michael W. Zuckerman, Thesis Advisors

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“A Mason is oblig’d, by his Tenure, to obey the moral Law; and if he rightly understands the Art, he will never be a stupid *Atheist*, nor an irreligious *Libertine*”

--James Anderson, *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons*

## **Acknowledgments**

It may seem odd for a mere Honors Thesis to have an acknowledgments page, but I believe that, particularly in my case, it is necessary. This experience has not been an easy or simple process and it would not have been possible without a number of people who deserve to be acknowledged as part of it.

First, I would like to acknowledge the University Scholars program and the History Department for inspiring and funding my research during my time here at Penn. Both of these groups have allowed me to learn so much about the research process and have given me opportunities that have proven invaluable.

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## **Introduction**

Many people are not aware that there were Jews in Colonial America, let alone among the ranks of Freemasons. This is unsurprising as, by the time of the Revolution, the Jewish population numbered about 2,500 across the colonies, only about one tenth of one percent of the population.<sup>1</sup> In the federal period, this number dropped to about 1,500 due to a combination of migration back to Europe or to the West Indies, and conversion and intermarriage.<sup>2</sup> However, despite being a small population, the Jews were a significant one. Jews were some of the most prominent members of their society. Most of them were middle class shopkeepers and merchants, and some were even rich by eighteenth century standards.

In 1772, the height of Newport, Rhode Island's commercial peak, nearly all of the Jewish heads of household ranked among the top 135 tax payers, out of about 1200 total. Aaron Lopez, a Jew, paid twice the tax of anyone else at £37 11s. 10d., his Father-in-Law, Jacob Rodrigues Rivera, ranked fifth on the list, and Moses Levy ranked 22<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>3</sup> In addition to monetary wealth, Jews also owned large amounts of land. In 1769, David Franks was the 13<sup>th</sup> largest landowner in Philadelphia with 235 acres of land,<sup>4</sup> and in 1773 Francis Salvador was the largest landowner in his district in South Carolina. As a result of this, Salvador became one of two representatives to the provincial congress and served in the state's first general assembly, despite the fact that Jews couldn't hold office

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Impact of the American Revolution on American Jews," in *The American Jewish Experience*, ed. Jonathan D. Sarna (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1997), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Oscar Reiss, *The Jews in Colonial America* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2004), 1.

<sup>3</sup> William Pencak, *Jews & Gentiles in Early America, 1654-1800* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 5.

<sup>4</sup> "Proprietary Tax of the City of Philadelphia—1769," *Pennsylvania Archives: Third Series*, Edited by William Henry Egle (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Wm. Stanley Ray, State Printer, 1897), 14:151-220.



or vote.<sup>5</sup> Whether monetary or proprietary, Jews had tremendous assets in society which forced people to pay attention and respect them. “There were very few Jews who did not enjoy a degree of comfort; most of them made a ‘good living’ and survived economically, though severe business reverses were by no means uncommon among them at some time or other”.<sup>6</sup> It was this overwhelming majority of middle and upper class Jews that led to a significant Jewish presence in the fraternity of the Freemasons.

Unlike other fraternal organizations that categorically denied Jewish membership, the Freemasons were tolerant of multiple religions. However, this did not mean that they were an entirely accepting organization. Freemasonry, especially during the Colonial Era, was almost exclusively for men of rank: the urban elites.<sup>7</sup> It was the economic success of Jews in America that made them eligible for membership among the Freemasons, and they took advantage of this opportunity. Many of them even became officers and helped to spread Masonry throughout the colonies. In addition, while not all people in early America were accepting of Jews, and some anti-Semitism does appear, the elites of the major cities where Jews lived (Newport, New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, and Savannah) tended to be philo-semitic, or appreciative of the Jewish religion.<sup>8</sup> This combination of Jewish elites and the elites’ interest in Judaism created a confluence of events that led to the acceptance of Jews among the Freemasons, as evidenced by the early membership records.

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<sup>5</sup> Pencak, *Jews & Gentiles in Early America, 1654-1800*, 124.

<sup>6</sup> Jacob R. Marcus, "The American Colonial Jew: A Study in Acculturation," in *The American Jewish Experience*, ed. Jonathan D. Sarna (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1997), 9.

<sup>7</sup> Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 51.

<sup>8</sup> Pencak, *Jews & Gentiles in Early America, 1654-1800*, 5.

This thesis will endeavor to look at the relationship between Jews and Freemasons in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It follows an increasingly narrow structure, observing and analyzing the Masonic organization at a number of levels and its intersection with Judaism. Chapter One is a discussion of Masonic symbols and how they overlap with Judaism and Jewish symbolism. The purpose of this is to understand what, on a fundamental level, might have been an attraction for Jews to Masonry or, at the very least, why they were not deterred from joining. Chapter Two is an examination of Masonic lodges and how both the structure of the lodge and its setting, may have facilitated Jewish involvement. Chapter Three looks at specific Jewish Masons to see how their involvement in the Jewish community interacted with their Masonic involvement, whether the two were related, and what their experience was.

It is important to note that, in my research, I have been unable to find another source that does the same thing that I am attempting to do or that asks the same questions. My research draws on work done by both Jewish-American historians and Masonic historians to, I hope, create a work that reconciles both sides and provides some clarity on the little-known connection between Jews and Masons. Within the secondary literature, the most similar work that I could find is the article entitled “The Jews and Masonry in the United States before 1810” by Samuel Oppenheim, published in the *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* in 1910. However, this source and my own work are fundamentally different. Oppenheim seeks to discuss the various Jews involved in Masonry in each colony and what their roles were, while only one of my chapters has similar goals. Instead, my view is more holistic, trying to understand the phenomenon of American Jewish Masonry at several levels rather than documenting its occurrence. This is not

meant to be disparaging. In fact, Oppenheim's work was extremely useful to me and was mentioned by several of the other Masonic historians that I reference throughout this thesis. This comparison is only meant to show how different my project is from its most closely related work. The rest of the secondary literature tends to focus on either Jewish American history or Masonic history. While these two groups of historians may occasionally mention the other group, their primary focus is either the Jews or the Masons, not both.

In regard to primary sources, there were relatively few relevant materials. While there were Jews with surviving Masonic correspondence, very little of it differed from any other type of correspondence and none of the documents that I found mentioned their religion at all. Within Masonic sources, because the Freemasons were a non-religious organization, religion of any sort was rarely mentioned. Therefore, the useful primary sources that I was able to find are highly varied. Some are speeches, some are administrative documents, and some are images, but none are in abundance. However, after searching a variety of libraries and archives, I am confident that I have done due diligence. Still, it is important to establish from the beginning that, because of the relative dearth of sources, much of this thesis is speculative. I use my knowledge of Masonry and my knowledge of early Jewish American history to hypothesize about why certain things may have (or may not have) happened and to theorize about the relationships between Judaism and Masonry during the time. It is the historian's job to work with what material survives to help us understand, to the best of our abilities, what happened in the past, and I am confident that this thesis fulfills that definition.

However, before we begin our discussion of the connections between Jews and Masons, it is important to understand the history of Jews and Masons in America individually and who the prototypical Jew and Mason were. This will help us to examine what the relationship between the two groups was and why we might think of them as incompatible.

Interestingly, the story of Jews in America is linked to the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. On March 31, 1492, the Edict of Expulsion was published which gave Jews until the end of July to leave Spain. As part of this treaty, Jews were allowed to bring all of their belongings except “gold or silver or coined money”.<sup>9</sup> It is no coincidence that Columbus's first voyage left in early August, right after all Jews were supposed to have left; it is largely thought that the money that Jews were required to leave behind went, in part, to funding Columbus's journey.

The three hundred thousand Jews who were living in Spain in 1492<sup>10</sup> spread out across Europe with most going east, but some going west to Portugal and some going north to Holland. Jews were soon expelled or forcibly converted in Portugal and the secret Jews, or Marranos as they are often called, were sent to Brazil with criminals when the Portuguese had trouble finding colonists for their new lands. Meanwhile, in Holland, Jews were not given full rights, but were allowed to practice their religion freely, and set up successful merchant and trading companies with the connections that they had made throughout their history of expulsion.<sup>11</sup> This helped make Amsterdam one of the wealthiest cities of the seventeenth century; when the Dutch West Indies Company

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<sup>9</sup> Edward Peters, “The Edict of Expulsion of the Jews,” Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture, accessed August 22, 2013, <http://www.sephardicstudies.org/decreed.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Harry L. Golden and Martin Rywell, *Jews in American History: Their Contribution To The United States, 1492-1950* (Charlotte, North Carolina: H.A. Stalls Printing Company, 1950), 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

formed in 1621, Amsterdam Jews flocked to it, eventually representing ten percent of its wealth.<sup>12</sup>

Holland's official policy of religious toleration encouraged the Marranos who had settled in Brazil to help the Dutch conquer. By 1631, the Dutch had captured Recife, the capitol of Portuguese Brazil.<sup>13</sup> Many of the Marranos converted back to Judaism, and Jews came from all over Europe to move to the newly Dutch Brazil. However, by 1654, Brazil had been retaken by the Portuguese, and the Jews were forced to flee.<sup>14</sup> Many went back to Holland, but a group of twenty three fled from Recife to the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam, arriving in September of 1654 aboard the ship *Sainte Catherine*.<sup>15</sup> This group, the Recife Jews, became the first Jewish community in what would become the American colonies.

Although it is believed that this group quickly dispersed, in many ways, they were indicators of who the early American Jews would be. Today, most American Jews are Ashkenazi, meaning that they came from Central and Eastern Europe. However, this first wave of Jewish migration to America is often categorized as Sephardic, meaning that they came from the Mediterranean area. Although these groups are defined by ethnicity, they are also differentiated by variances in religious practice.<sup>16</sup> By the late eighteenth century, the Ashkenazim were starting to outnumber the Sephardim in certain areas, the practices of the existing synagogues remained overwhelmingly Sephardic. The Recife

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<sup>12</sup> Golden and Rywell, *Jews in American History*, 11

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 10-1.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>15</sup> Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 13.

<sup>16</sup> For example, today an Ashkenazi Jew might not eat rice on Passover because, when you cook it, it absorbs water and "rises". However, because rice is integral to the diet of many Sephardic Jews, they continue to eat rice and have their own standards for what is Kosher for Passover.

Jews were Sephardic and, as the first Jewish community in America, had brought their customs with them. While they were not responsible for the spread of Sephardic Judaism throughout the colonies, they were indicative of the type of Jews who came to the colonies.

In addition, the Jews who arrived in America tended to be wealthy and well connected. Through their many expulsions and the financial jobs that they were often legally limited to in Europe, Jews had accrued a number of contacts across European countries which gave them an advantage in business and trade. That is why many of them became merchants and shopkeepers when they came to America and why they were concentrated in port cities. These professions tended to place people in the middle and upper classes, thus, the Jewish population in America tended to be middle and upper class.

The Recife Jews used these connections to their wealthy friends and family in the Netherlands when the Dutch Calvinist governor of New Amsterdam, Peter Stuyvesant, had asked the Dutch West India Company to remove them from the New Netherland colony. In response, the Recife wrote to Amsterdam, asking their friends and families to petition the Dutch West India Company. These petitions carried weight since many Jews had invested in the company. The Dutch West India Company's response to Stuyvesant indicates this, saying:

We would have liked to effectuate and fulfill your wishes and request that the new territories should no more be allowed to be infected by people of the Jewish nation...but...we observe that this would be somewhat unreasonable and unfair, especially because of the considerable loss sustained by this nation, with others, in the taking of Brazil, as also because of the large amount of capital which they still have invested in the shares of this company. Therefore after many deliberations we have finally decided and resolved to apostille upon a certain petition presented

by said Portuguese Jews that these people may travel and trade to and in New Netherland and live and remain there, provided the poor among them shall not become a burden to the company or to the community, but be supported by their own nation.<sup>17</sup>

As is clear from this quote, they, somewhat unwillingly, agreed to accept Jews into their colony. Jews were allowed to live and do business there, which is more than could be said for many of the other places that they had lived. However, what this example most demonstrates about the early American Jewish community as a whole is their powerful connections. This is what facilitated their rise in status and, eventually, what allowed them to join organizations like the Freemasons.

The Freemasons were an elite organization made up, primarily, of middle and upper class urban males. While this organization didn't start in America, American lodges developed their own character and made significant contributions to society as a whole. However, the origins of Masonry are not known for certain. Freemasonry, as it exists today and as it existed in the eighteenth century, refers to speculative Masonry rather than operative Masonry. The distinction between these two types of masonry is that modern Freemasonry is “a male fraternal order, not an association of stonelayers.”<sup>18</sup> By 1717, these non-craftsmen had taken over, but they adopted the mythology and the history of the stone masons.<sup>19</sup> It was this transformation of what was initially the guild for stone masons that allowed it to survive and “transition into modern market conditions.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Dutch West India Company, "The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History," *Reply to Stuyvesant's Petition (April 26, 1655)*, Edited by Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 453.

<sup>18</sup> Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840*, 10.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Margaret C. Jacob, *The Origins of Freemasonry Facts & Fictions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 11.

Historian of American Freemasonry, Steven Bullock, lays out three traditions that speculative Masonry was built upon. First is the “belief in the great antiquity of the builder's practices.”<sup>21</sup> This was the connection to the original stone masons guild and provided the ancient narrative of the organization, much of which came from biblical sources. This is, at least in part, the reason that the Freemasons are seen as an ancient organization. They are relatively recent in historical terms, but, since their beginnings, they drew on ancient rituals which, in addition to giving them a history, gave them legitimacy. Second is the brotherhood's connection “with sociability and science”<sup>22</sup>; in other words, their connection to the enlightenment. This ideology is reflected in some of their practices, like elections, having a centralized Grand Lodge, and their Constitution, as well as the values that they espouse.<sup>23</sup> Third, and finally, is the link of Masonry to high social status. Not only did its connections to gentility help to establish the authority of elites within society, but the elites who were involved in Masonry soon dominated the Masonic hierarchy as well as their public image.<sup>24</sup> Thus, membership in the Masonic organization quickly left the literal masons behind in favor of the elite, enlightened members of society.

Freemasonry as it is structured today, with a Grand Lodge at its center, is thought to have originated in 1717. In June of that year, four existing London lodges joined together to create a Grand Lodge. Although these lodges contained both craftsmen and non-craftsmen, they placed a gentleman at their head, indicating how pervasive the shift from operative to speculative Masonry had become. In fact, “no craft Mason would ever

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<sup>21</sup> Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 10.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Jacob, *The Origins of Freemasonry Facts & Fictions*, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 10.



serve as grand master.”<sup>25</sup> Soon after, in 1723, James Anderson's *Masonic Constitutions* was published and would quickly become a canonical Masonic text. In the version of Anderson's 1723 Constitutions reprinted in Philadelphia in 1734, the first section under “The Charges Of a FREE-MASON” is entitled “*Concerning GOD and RELIGION.*”<sup>26</sup> In this section, it clearly states:

A *Mason* is oblig'd, by his Tenure, to obey the moral Law; and if he rightly understands the Art, he will never be a stupid *Atheist*, nor an irreligious *Libertine*. But though in ancient Times Masons were charg'd in every Country to be of the Religion of that Country or Nation, whatever it was, yet 'tis now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that Religion in which all Men agree, leaving their particular Opinions to themselves; that is, to be *good Men and true*, or Men of Honour and Honesty, by whatever Denominations of Persuasions they may be distinguish'd.<sup>27</sup>

This is extremely important because it is an explicit statement that people of any religion, as long as they believed in a God and were good people, could become Masons. The presence of the Constitution, as well as the egalitarian ideology that it espouses in this section, are products of the Enlightenment period in which it was written. These ideas are also evident in American political documents from the time, possibly explaining why Masonry became so important in early America.

Colonial American Masonry began in the 1730s and was not, at least initially, welcoming to a wide range of members. In fact, membership was limited to upper class elite males. Through membership in the fraternity, these men sought to establish their place in society through “selective anglicization.”<sup>28</sup> However, American Masons would

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<sup>25</sup> Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 15.

<sup>26</sup> James Anderson, *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons. Containing the History, Charges, Regulations, &c. of That Most Ancient and Right Worshipful Fraternity* (Philadelphia, 1734), 47-8.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>28</sup> Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 51.

not always seek to imitate their English brethren. Although the earliest American lodges, had needed permission from London to become established and had modeled themselves on the system found there, by the 1760s, Americans had “broken with the orthodoxy of the Grand Lodge and its official history.”<sup>29</sup> This was through the shift from the Moderns to the Ancients. Somewhat counterintuitively, the Moderns are the older form of Masonry and the Ancients are the newer form.

It is uncertain exactly when the Ancients split from the Moderns, but it was sometime before 1756 when Laurence Dermott wrote the separate Book of Constitutions of the Ancients.<sup>30</sup> Dermott was an Irishman and, thus, the more formal aspects of Ancient Masonry were based off of practices found in Ireland. However, the differences between the practices of the Ancients and Moderns were relatively minor. The primary difference between the way that each group practiced Masonry was that the Ancients were more committed to preserving rituals, thus, retaining their “ancient” character while the Moderns were more amenable to change. By the time that the American Grand Lodges were formed after the American Revolution, 55 percent of them claimed that they had come from Ancient lodges, showing that Ancient Masonry had firmly established itself in the colonies.<sup>31</sup> This statistic alone may seem unconvincing, but, when the statistics are broken down by state, this trend appears more significant. Although the Ancient lodges appeared after the Moderns had been established, in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware 100 percent of the Grand Lodges claimed Ancient Masonry and

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<sup>29</sup> Jacob, *The Origins of Freemasonry Facts & Fictions*, 31.

<sup>30</sup> Barnes A. Sharitt, Jr, “Ancients and Moderns: Differences and Similarities,” *The Grand Lodge of Minnesota Ancient Free & Accepted Masons* (November 12, 2001), accessed October 20, 2013, <http://www.mn-masons.org/sites/mn-masons.org/files/3571.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

all other American Grand Lodges, except for Rhode Island, Connecticut, and North Carolina claimed at least 50 percent Ancient Masonry.<sup>32</sup>

However, Ancient Masonry was not the only variation that found a home in the American colonies. Organizations that utilized symbolic Masonry formed, including the York Rite and Scottish Rite groups, which were characterized by their own hierarchical systems.<sup>33</sup> The Scottish Rite, also referred to as Perfect and Sublime Masonry, and later known as the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, emerged through the Ancients as a system of higher degrees, or rankings.<sup>34</sup> While there had only been three degrees in Masonry, the Scottish Rite innovation initially introduced 25 degrees and would eventually have 33. This contrasted with the York Rite which retained the original three degrees, but had three distinct subsections that contained three or four additional degrees which could be obtained.<sup>35</sup> While the York Rite would find great popularity in America, the Scottish Rite was very popular among Jews. These two groups were not exclusive to America, and were also seen in European Masonry but, for the purposes of the thesis, it is most important to understand the place of the Scottish Rite in America, since it was the type of Masonry with a distinct connection to American Jews.

It is hard to say exactly what attracted Jews to this type of Masonry, but, perhaps, it was because of the work that Moses Michael Hays, a Jew, did to advance symbolic Masonry and to introduce the 'Perfect and Sublime Degrees' to the United States.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Sharitt, Jr, "Ancients and Moderns: Differences and Similarities," *The Grand Lodge of Minnesota Ancient Free & Accepted Masons*, <http://www.mn-masons.org/sites/mn-masons.org/files/3571.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Mark A. Tabbert, *American Freemasons: Three Centuries of Building Communities* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), xviii.

<sup>34</sup> Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 240.

<sup>35</sup> "The York Rite." <http://www.yorkrite.com/getrifold.html> (accessed November 15, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> Julius F. Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: The New Era Printing Company, 1915), 19.

Philadelphia, the enlightened colonial city, was the “mother city” of symbolic Masonry in the Western World and was the revival site for 'Perfect and Sublime' Masonry, allowing it to become the active Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite.<sup>37</sup> It was also here that symbolic Masonry became established in the Jewish community and spread, through them, across the states.<sup>38</sup>

It is from this point that we can begin to establish the connections between Judaism and Masonry in America. Through looking at the symbols of Masonry, the lodges, and individual Jewish Masons, we can observe at every level the integration of the two organizations and how they relate to each other. Ultimately, although it sounds surprising that many of the early Jews in America were Masons, upon further investigation, it would be more surprising if they weren't.

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<sup>37</sup> Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*, 12.

<sup>38</sup> Read more in Chapters 2 and 3.

## **Chapter One: Masonic Symbols and Judaism**

Because the connection between Jews and Masons seems so surprising to our modern sensibilities, it is important to take an overarching look at where these groups overlap. One way to understand this connection, at the broadest level, is to look at the history and symbols that are common to both organizations. An organization's appropriation of symbols and the stories that they tell about their past can be revealing of their values and can tell us about how they want to be seen by others. Particularly in an exploration of the intersections between two groups, shared symbols reflect shared values and, in the case of Jews and Masons, give us some insight into why Jews might have been open to joining Masonry as well as why Masons may have allowed Jewish membership.

The Freemasons are an organization tied to ancient history and ritual, thus their symbols serve a very important role in the characterization of the fraternity. Although the practices and rituals of Masons can vary, much of the symbolism that is used seems to be consistent throughout the organization and its affiliates, thus allowing an in-depth look at symbols to be representative of the organization as whole. Many Masonic symbols are biblical, largely from the Old Testament, so, although they are part of Christian lore, they have Jewish significance as well. The discussion of Masonic symbolism and its Jewish connections is not one of why Masons incorporated Jewish symbols into their traditions, but, rather, speculation about how the Jewish significance of specific Masonic symbols may have been an attraction of Masonry for Jews.

### **Star of David/Seal of Solomon**

For the modern Jew, the most recognizable symbol is probably the Star of David. This six-sided star is often called a “Jewish Star” and even appears on the flag of the state of Israel, a country created to be a nation for the Jews. However, this exclusivity as a Jewish symbol is a modern development. Like so many other shapes that serve as symbols, it has a long history.

The Star of David was used as early as the Bronze Age in areas ranging from Europe to South-East Asia. It can be found on ancient Jewish artifacts, but doesn't appear to have any particular religious significance in that context. Instead, it was used widely by Jews, Christians, and Muslims and, over time, it earned a general significance as a symbol which carried magical powers, although it was not explicitly connected to any group.<sup>1</sup> In its magical applications, it is normally referred to as the “Seal of Solomon”, referring to the son of King David and the biblical King known for his wisdom. Its first appearance as a specifically Jewish symbol was in the seventeenth century when followers of Shabbetai Tsevi, a false prophet who claimed to be the messiah, adopted it. In the late eighteenth century, its Jewish significance spread to western Europe.<sup>2</sup> Yet, despite this connotation, it still continued to be widely used by other groups, including the Freemasons.

In Masonry, it seems, the meaning of the Seal of Solomon was about as unspecific as it was for the Jews of the period. In fact, it is more likely that it was included in

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, ed., *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007) s.v. "Magen David," [http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE|CX2587512997&v=2.1&u=upenn\\_main&it=r&p=GVR&sw=w&asid=740b1aaf546b49c9f5f2eac94498c2cd](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE|CX2587512997&v=2.1&u=upenn_main&it=r&p=GVR&sw=w&asid=740b1aaf546b49c9f5f2eac94498c2cd) (accessed November 27, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Lindsay Jones, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005) s.v. "Magen David," [http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE|CX3424501887&v=2.1&u=upenn\\_main&it=r&p=GVR&sw=w&asid=51db7ff1856b5b043f0e65bf6cbb55f0](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE|CX3424501887&v=2.1&u=upenn_main&it=r&p=GVR&sw=w&asid=51db7ff1856b5b043f0e65bf6cbb55f0) (accessed November 27, 2013).

Masonic symbolism for its connections to King Solomon than for its independent meaning as a talisman to protect a home or business. The star was said to have magical properties and its inscription on the signet of Solomon was said to have given him access to genii to help build his Temple.<sup>3</sup> The Temple was of specific significance for Masons because they traced their history back to the stonemasons who worked on it. Thus, this story of the star using its powers to help build the Temple would have been important to Masons.

In addition to its connection to Solomon, the star's longevity and ancient roots are things that would help contribute to a rich Masonic history. Use of this symbol connected them to many ancient civilizations, which is something that they sought for legitimacy. In fact, other than the cross, the Seal of Solomon was one of the most prevalent symbols in the ancient world, being found from Europe to India.<sup>4</sup> So, not only did it connect them to the ancient past, but it furthered their idea that they were a group that was accepting of all people despite their beliefs.

Despite the symbol's lack of specific significance for both Masons and Jews of the time, its presence in both is important to note. The incorporation of the Seal of Solomon, a symbol that Jews were familiar with, into visible symbols of Masonry may have been part of what attracted Jews to Masonry as an organization. Although the Seal of Solomon did not yet have the same significance to Jews as the cross did to Christians, it was a symbol that was part of their Jewish history and, certainly, it was not one that excluded them. While the cross was a symbol used in Masonry, it was not as prolific as the Seal of

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<sup>3</sup> Albert G. Mackey et. al., *An Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry and Its Kindred Sciences Comprising the Whole Range of Art, Sciences and Literature as Connected with the Institution* (New York: The Masonic History Company, 1919), 674.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 674-5.

Solomon. Therefore, it probably would not serve as a force of opposition to Jewish membership.

While this star is certainly not one of the most important symbols of Masonry, it does appear in a number of areas including on seals and as part of the architecture. One notable example is on the seal of the Charleston Lodge of Perfection.<sup>5</sup> This seal contains a number of Masonic symbols including the most famous and identifiable one, the square and compass. In the corner directly above the square and compass, there is the Seal of Solomon. This placement would seem to indicate a similar regard for the two symbols. In fact, one could argue that the Seal of Solomon is the most visible symbol, as it is surrounded by a light circle against a dark background. It was clearly not something that they were trying to hide.



**Image 1: The Seal of the Lodge of Perfection in Charleston, South Carolina**

Julius F. Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: The New Era Printing Company, 1915).

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<sup>5</sup> Refer to Image 1.



The presence on this seal in particular is notable, because this lodge was started by a Jewish Mason, Isaac da Costa.<sup>6</sup> While it is unlikely that he included the Seal of Solomon as an indicator of a Jewish or Jewish-friendly lodge since it was not a specifically Jewish symbol at the time, its presence indicates that the Seal was significant for the character of the lodge. It is possible that da Costa included it as a symbol of religious tolerance and a connection to the ancient world. While its Jewish significance cannot be totally overlooked or cast aside because of da Costa's connection to the lodge as well as the relative absence of this symbol on a variety of other Masonic seals, it cannot be considered a solely Jewish symbol within this context.

While it was uncommon to include this symbol on a seal of a lodge, it was more common to include it in Masonic architecture. The star's presence in Masonic architecture



**Image 2: A Fireback from Massachusetts, c. 1756-1787**

John D. Hamilton, *Material Culture of the American Freemasons* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994), 72.

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<sup>6</sup> The story of this lodge will be elaborated on in the following chapters.

is probably linked to its significance as a talismanic protection against things like fire.<sup>7</sup> In the case of the fireback with the Seal of Solomon, there is a clear applicability to the protective powers of the symbol. On the seal, there is less of a clear connection, thus, its presence is important to note because it is unusual.

### **King Solomon's Temple**

In a discussion of objects of Masonic importance that also have Jewish significance, the Temple of King Solomon is probably the most important for the Masons. Because the Freemasons trace their lineage to the stone masons who helped to build King Solomon's Temple, it has particular significance to them. The form that this symbol took, besides its discussion in speeches and its role in the origin of Masonry, was in the Masons' attempts to recreate the Temple in their lodges. Each lodge is considered a part of the Temple created by the Grand Architect of the Universe, or God, to help humanity.<sup>8</sup> Thus, it must pass the scrutiny of the almighty, or risk being destroyed.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to holding Masons to a moral code, the concept of the Temple took the wisdom, strength, and beauty associated with the three basic elements of the Masonic framework (religion, stonemasons, and Enlightenment) and united them. As Brother Mark A. Tabbert said “Within a lodge, men of differing faiths accepted the Temple as a symbol from which respect and brotherly love could grow.”<sup>10</sup> Because the Temple was familiar to the various religions categorized under the Masonic requirement of believing in a God, it was able to serve as a symbol of the brotherhood of the lodge as well as the

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<sup>7</sup> Refer to Image 2.

<sup>8</sup> J.S.M. Ward, *An Interpretation of Our Masonic Symbols* (London: A. Lewis, 1924), 138.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-9.

<sup>10</sup> Mark A. Tabbert, *American Freemasons: Three Centuries of Building Communities* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 22.

spirituality of Masonry. After all, although the Masons had no connection to a particular religion, their rituals and connections to ancient times created a pseudo-religion that its members could practice in addition to whatever religion they affiliated themselves with.

Besides being present in the symbolism of the lodge, discussion of Solomon's Temple was a theme that often appeared in Masonic speeches. One such speech was given by David M'Clure at the installation of Village Lodge in Simsbury, Connecticut.<sup>11</sup> This speech was entitled “Solomon *and* Hiram; *or Jews and Gentiles united, in building the Church of God*” and it attempts to use “the happy peace and mutual friendship and esteem, which existed between the ancient monarchs Solomon and Hiram, to explain the nature and recommend the obligations of brotherly love.”<sup>12</sup> M'Clure talks about the kinship of Solomon and Hiram and how Hiram “tho' king over an idolatrous people” worshiped the one true God, whom he learned of from the Jews.<sup>13</sup> Together, with the vision and laborers from Solomon and the craftsmen and laborers from Hiram, they were able to create a worthy temple for God. M'Clure uses this story as an allegory to talk about how mankind belongs together. He says “Man is weak and wretched in solitude, but powerful and happy in society”<sup>14</sup>, arguing that it is best for men to work together and love and help each other because, when they do, they achieve greatness.

What is interesting about the structure of this speech is that M'Clure does not explicitly mention Masons until nearly the end. In fact, most of the speech is composed of the stories of Solomon and Hiram. He doesn't explicitly make the connection between Masons and Solomon until the end of his speech when he says “Bear the Hod of patience

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<sup>11</sup> David M'Clure, *A Sermon, Delivered at the Installation of Village Lodge* (Hartford: Hudson & Goodwin, 1795).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 14.

in the necessary labors and sufferings of life, and ascend to the Ladder of honorable promotion, and be worthy of a seat in Solomon's chair. And let the white and fair Apron, be truly significant of your innocence and purity of character, and fidelity in all business.”<sup>15</sup> Here, he finally relates the glory of Solomon to the Masonic symbol of the stonemason's Apron and, as in the rest of the sermon, encourages them to take the lessons of King Solomon to heart in their interactions with others and charitable causes.

Besides showing the importance of Solomon in Masonic lore, this speech shows us that Solomon had enough of a Masonic connection that an outsider, like David M'Clure, knew its Masonic significance and thought it an appropriate sermon topic at the installation of a lodge. This is important because, if M'Clure knew about the Masonic connection to Solomon, it is likely that Jews not already involved in Masonry might have been aware of this connection between their beliefs and Masonry. This is vital because, if it was not something that they might be aware of, then it is not something that could have attracted them to the Masonic fraternity. Thus, the apparent public knowledge of King Solomon's importance as a historical figure for Masons could have made Masonry more appealing to Jews.

In this way, the importance and prominence of the symbol of Solomon's Temple was a huge advantage for attracting Jewish membership. Although it was deeply engrained in Masonic symbolism and history, its neutral character among religions that believed in a deity allowed Jews and Christians alike to find meaning in its incorporation and find a place within Masonry. Solomon is widely respected in Judaism for his wisdom, so the Enlightenment values of the Masons were not opposed to his elevation as, in some ways, a founding father of Masonry. Seeing a Jew from the Bible exalted in

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<sup>15</sup> M'Clure, *A Sermon, Delivered at the Installation of Village Lodge*, 22.

such a way was probably comforting and welcoming for Jews who were interested in becoming Masons.

### **Biblical Figures**

In addition to Solomon, other biblical figures appear as part of the Masonic canon. While not all of them are Old Testament and, thus, Jewish figures, many of them are. One place that these Biblical figures commonly appear is in the names of various lodges. While there are certainly lodges named after Christian saints, particularly St. John, it is also common to see lodges named after King David and King Solomon. One example is King David's Lodge, originally in New York City and moved to Newport, Rhode Island. This lodge is worth noting because its founder was Moses Michael Hays, a Jew and one of the most important Masons in early America, and it had many Jewish members in both locations. Because the founder of a lodge gets to choose its name, his choice of King David is notable. In all likelihood, it was his way of connecting the lodge to the ancient Jewish King in an attempt to incorporate Jewish-friendly or neutral symbols into his lodge. While Hays might have thought to use the name of a lodge as a religious indicator, it was possible that the name was chosen arbitrarily or was just chosen because it was something that he felt a connection to.

In addition to David and Solomon, another Old Testament figure that appears in Masonry is Noah. In the Constitutions of the Grand Lodge of New York, published in 1794, the section entitled “*Concerning God and Religion*” discusses the Masonic goal of emulating Noah.<sup>16</sup> This is an important section for Jewish Masons because it is the part

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<sup>16</sup> Grand Lodge of New York, *The Constitutions of the Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons in the State of New York* (New York: Childs and Swaine, 1794), 5.

that establishes the, relative, religious tolerance of the Masons. This section exists in every copy of the Constitution that I have seen and much of it reads the same from version to version. However, although I have seen references to Noah in other Masonic works, this was the first time that I saw it incorporated into the Constitution. It says “A mason is also obliged, by his tenure, to observe the moral law, as a true *Noachida*”, or son of Noah.<sup>17</sup> In this way, Masons would unite brothers of all different religions, who otherwise might not join together, to strengthen the “divine obligations of *religion* and *love!*”<sup>18</sup>

Biblically, Noah was a good man in a world of sinners who brought animals from all over the world together on his ark to save them from a flood that destroyed the world. After 40 days and 40 nights, the rain stopped and the waters started to subside. Then, with his family and all of the animals on his ark, Noah started the world anew. In their attempt to be like Noah, Masons emphasize their charitable goals as well as their diverse backgrounds. As Noah brought together animals from all over, the Masons bring together people from all different beliefs and backgrounds and unite them to make the world a better place. For the Masons, the incorporation of Noah was likely a way of emphasizing their religious tolerance, rather than reaching out to Jews specifically. They were trying to emphasize their enlightened acceptance of people from different backgrounds by incorporating people of different religions, but only if those religions fit with Masonic ideals. The Jewish significance of Noah is only notable because Jews were accepted by Masons.

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<sup>17</sup> Grand Lodge of New York, *The Constitutions of the Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons in the State of New York*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

Although Noah was not a part of the Masonic canon in the way that Solomon was, his presence in a document as important as the Constitution indicates that he was a significant Masonic figure. Because he was an Old Testament figure, the respect that Masons had for him as a model character was probably welcoming for Jews. They did not need to feel alienated by aspirations that they could not relate to, like an emulation of Jesus. Instead, the widespread use of Old Testament figures like Noah and Solomon allowed most of those in the religions that were accepted by Masons (all those except for the “unhappy *libertine*, the *deist*, or stupid *atheist*”<sup>19</sup>) to find common roots in the connections to these characters. Although Jews may not have emulated Noah themselves, the respect that Masons showed to the Old Testament through the use of its characters certainly would not have been off-putting, and would likely have been welcoming, for Jews interested in becoming Masons.

### **Symbolic Significance for Jews**

Ultimately, the significance of looking at Masonic symbols and their connections to Judaism is an attempt to understand how, at the most basic and foundational level, the Masonic brotherhood might have appealed to Jews and been compatible with their lifestyle and their beliefs. Many fraternal organizations of the time did not allow Jews to join, so the Masons were already seen as more open. However, if they had been opposed to Jewish beliefs, it is possible that Jews would not have joined in such significant numbers.

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<sup>19</sup> Grand Lodge of New York, *The Constitutions of the Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons in the State of New York*, 5.

This raises the questions of why Jews joined the Masons and why the Masons accepted Jews. The reasons that Jews joined the Masons seem to be clearer. The Masons were an elite organization, so, by joining the Masons, Jews established themselves as part of the American elite. In addition, it expanded their social networks beyond the Jewish community to other powerful people. This helped in their personal business ventures, but would also help in their more long term goals of increased acceptance and equality. This is evidenced by one of the most famous interactions in American Jewish history, the letter sent by the Touro synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island from Congregation Yeshuat Israel to President George Washington, dated August 17, 1790. Interestingly enough, Moses Seixas, the man who delivered this letter, also delivered one from King David's Lodge, the largely Jewish lodge that had been started by Moses Michael Hays, at the same time. The letter from Yeshuat Israel, states:

Deprived as we heretofore have been of the invaluable rights of free Citizens, we now with a deep sense of gratitude to the Almighty disposer of all events behold a Government, erected by the Majesty of the People -- a Government, which to bigotry gives no sanction, to persecution no assistance -- but generously affording to all Liberty of conscience, and immunities of Citizenship: deeming every one, of whatever Nation, tongue, or language equal parts of the great governmental Machine.<sup>20</sup>

This clearly expresses the Jews' desire to be treated as equals within society. This is something that they found in Masonry. The connections that they made opened up opportunities for them and put them in contact with some of the most important politicians of the day who could actually improve their lives, as seen through their

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<sup>20</sup> Moses Seixas, "Moses Seixas' Letter from Congregation Yeshuat Israel," Touro Synagogue, <http://www.tourosynagogue.org/index.php/history-learning/tsf-intro-menu/slom-scholarship/85-seixas-letter> (accessed December 1, 2013).



contact with President Washington. It is noteworthy that the same man was representative of both Masons and Jews, and this connection certainly helped the Jewish cause.

In addition, the Jews were treated as equals within the Masonic organization. Although they may not have had complete rights within American law, they were given the same rights within Masonry. Because Masonry is a religiously neutral organization, religion was not a basis for the denial of rights and, in fact, many Jews were able to form lodges and gain some of the most respected positions in American Masonry.

The other side of the question is also important to address: why would Masons want to accept Jews? In America, their desire to remain an organization for elites meant that the class from which they were drawing their membership had many Jews in it, particularly in major urban areas. Although Masonry may have helped Jews become more elite, Jews were already some of the richest men in the country and the connections that other Masons made with them could only help economically.

Another possible reason for Masonic acceptance of Jews is the simultaneous desire for ancient roots as well as a commitment to Enlightenment philosophy that lay at the core of Masonic development. The Jewish religion had the ancient roots that the Freemasons were seeking and, like the Puritans who sought legitimacy through Jewish converts, felt that the presence of Jews in their organization legitimized and gave weight to their use of Old Testament biblical figures in their canon. In addition, Enlightenment principles of human and natural rights pushed for increased toleration and acceptance, thus making it harder for Masons to appropriate them without accepting people from a variety of religions.

In the end, the relationship that developed between Masons and Jews was good for both sides. They each gained access and acceptance, on an individual level as well as on an organizational one, and their histories fit together nicely. Masonry was one of the few fraternal organizations open to Jews and their canon, which was consistent with Jewish beliefs and actually incorporated Jewish symbols and figures, allowed Jews to feel comfortable joining without sacrificing their beliefs and culture.

## **Chapter Two: Judaism Within Masonic Lodges**

While symbols tell us about the Masonic organization as a whole, a look at lodges gives us a more local and specific understanding of the Masonry that people in the eighteenth century experienced. This can help reveal connections between Jewish Masons and their Christian brothers within the lodges, both in their formation and in their more ideological functions. Beyond the Jewish significance of the names of certain lodges, the membership and the structure of the lodge itself incorporated Jews, and likely gave them a degree of comfort among Masons.

The “lodge” served as both the physical building where Masons met and the group of Masons who met there<sup>1</sup>, thus it was the thing that was most likely to attract or deter Jews from joining. The people who made up the lodge could have rejected Jews or made them feel uncomfortable but, instead, we see them welcoming them as brothers and even letting them start their own lodges. Thus, an examination of American lodges reveals that the structure, membership, and opportunities provided by Masonic lodges were all things that helped to facilitate Jewish involvement in Masonry.

### **Significance of Lodge Interactions for Jews**

In Europe and in America, Jews were used to being excluded from social organizations because of their religion. Masons were an exception. They were a non-religious organization that welcomed all people as long as they were of good moral character and they believed in God. Jews took advantage of this opportunity and quickly joined. For the Jews of the American colonies, the lodges were where they were able to interact with their non-Jewish brothers and make connections among the urban economic

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<sup>1</sup> J.S.M. Ward, *An Interpretation of Our Masonic Symbols* (London: A. Lewis, 1924), 135.

elite, not only in their cities, but around the world. This helped give the developing Jewish communities in America legitimacy and acceptance that they might not otherwise have received by cementing their status among the elites and adding to their, already extensive, networks.

One instance in which we see the result of lodge connections is in the building of Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia, PA. In 1788, when the Jews of Philadelphia needed money to finish the synagogue for their congregation, some elite Gentiles stepped in to help. These men included Benjamin Franklin, Thomas McKean, David Rittenhouse, and Charles Biddle.<sup>2</sup> While all of these men were prominent, Franklin is the only one that we know to have been a Mason. It is hard to say definitively that Franklin donated to Mikveh Israel because he knew some of the Jews involved in that community through the Masons. However, although the participation of non-Jewish elites in funding the building of the synagogue may not have been directly the result of brother to brother interactions, many of the non-Jewish elite networks were accessed by Jews through the Masonic brotherhood.

Beyond the opportunity to connect with non-Jews, the interactions in the lodges also helped Jews to acculturate, both in Europe and in America. In Europe, this was largely a matter of timing. The Grand Lodges that appeared, particularly in England, from 1730 to 1750, coincided with the evolution of the more acculturated Jew.<sup>3</sup> Prior to this period, the European Jews were often confined to certain jobs and certain spaces by the countries in which they resided. This led to a concentrated community that created its

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<sup>2</sup> William Pencak, *Jews & Gentiles in Early America, 1654-1800* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 182.

<sup>3</sup> Jacob Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe 1723-1939*, translated by Leonard Oschry (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 2.

own culture, independent of its location. In the eighteenth century, however, with discussions of Jewish emancipation and increased opportunities, Jews began to adapt to their environment and become more acculturated.<sup>4</sup> When Jews were allowed to join Masonic lodges, it put them into direct contact with non-Jews and customs that were foreign to them, which only served as a catalyst to their acculturation.

This brings up a question of why Jews remained Jews when acculturation provided so much opportunity that could only be furthered by conversion. Ultimately, the truth is that not all of them did. In fact, many converted or married outside of the Jewish faith which, at the time, was considered just as bad as conversion. In fact, when Phila Franks, a member of the prominent Jewish Franks family, married Oliver Delancey, a wealthy gentile, her mother, Abigaill Franks, wrote a letter to Phila's brother Naphtali saying "as for his [Oliver Delancey's] wife, I am Determined I never will See nor Lett none of ye Family Goe near her,"<sup>5</sup> essentially disowning her daughter.

Yet, those who continued to practice Judaism faced relatively little opposition to their religion in America. They were, in general, allowed to practice their religion and were even granted the right of residence, even if they did not have equal political rights.<sup>6</sup> As historian Hasia Diner argues, in the colonies, "no one group could claim significantly longer roots than anyone else" so someone's ability to be successful and help the colony profit was more important than their religion. Jew could help with this, so they were tolerated, and Jews were happy with what rights they were given; after all, in America,

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<sup>4</sup> Beth Wenger, "Jews in the Modern World," Lecture, Class at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, January 18, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Abigaill Franks, "Abigaill Franks to Naphtali Franks, June 7, 1743," *The Letters of Abigaill Levy Franks, 1733-1748*, Edited by Edith B. Gelles (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 127.

<sup>6</sup> Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 23.

Jews were able to reach a higher status than they had access to almost anywhere else in the world.<sup>7</sup>

In America, Jews were already more inclined to acculturate based on their environment. They were such a small population (less than one tenth of one percent of the total population) that it was in their best interest to get to know those outside of the Jewish community and develop relationships with them. It was unlikely that they would find success through isolation, and the opportunities, both political and economic, that branching out afforded them provided little reason for resistance. By acting like the other elites in American society, they helped to remove any label that Jews were given as an “other” and gained acceptance in society.

The Jewish willingness to behave like those around them opened them up to more extended interactions with the non-Jewish elite. Masonry was one of the organizations that helped to facilitate this acculturation. Jews could observe things like style of dress and actions, but to be able to interact with elite society in an acculturated manner, Jews needed to understand the beliefs and ideas of their target society. Through Masonic participation, they became familiar with parliamentary law, rationalistic thought, and the views of their non-Jewish neighbors, allowing them to participate more freely in society. Any Mason was allowed to go to any lodge and were to be welcomed as peers, thus, allowing them to get to know some of the most important men from each colony and learn from them. “The order was thus an instrument of anglicization and americanization.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000*, 24.

<sup>8</sup> Jacob R. Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew 1492-1776* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), 3:1169.

## Formation of “Jewish Lodges”

American Freemasonry was a product of European Masonry and thus, at least with early lodge formation, many of the trends started there carried over. These connections were sometimes structural or ideological, but they also may have affected membership. In Europe, Jews had been allowed to join lodges from early on. The earliest record that we have of this was in London in 1732 when Edward Rose was initiated into the London Lodge. This led to a discussion among lodges about whether or not they would admit Jews. We know that the results of their discussion were positive because, in the following years, many Jews became members of various London lodges.<sup>9</sup>

However, despite lodges being open to Jews, at least in name, separate Jewish lodges formed. This reflects actions by both the Jews and the Christian Masons. In order to become a Mason, one had to be initiated into a lodge. This was determined by the brothers already in that lodge, and they were not required to give any justification as to why they were rejecting a candidate. Jews could have been rejected solely based on their religion, finding a way around the explicit declaration of acceptance in the Masonic Constitution by saying it was due to moral corruption. For example, a lodge in London in 1793 decided that any Jews who applied would be denied membership since there was no possibility of their acceptance.<sup>10</sup> While documented instances of discrimination against Jews were rare, they did happen, and some Jews who were already Masons may have responded in kind by starting their own lodges.

On the other hand, when Jews joined European lodges, they sought to retain as much of their religion as possible. In 1756, an anthology was published which contained

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<sup>9</sup> Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe 1723-1939*, 16.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

an altered prayer for Jews to use at the opening of a lodge meeting. This changed sections that did not fit with Jewish belief, such as an address to “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost”. This new version was intended to be used at a Jewish lodge, indicating that they were already in existence by the 1750s, but it reflects an attitude that existed prior to their development.<sup>11</sup> Jews who joined the Masonic brotherhood wanted to be accepted, without having to sacrifice their beliefs. The opening of Jewish lodges may just as easily been as a result of a desire to dictate the terms and practices of their lodge as much as it was the result of discrimination against Jews. Jews who opened their own lodges could use the prayers that they wanted, practice Masonry how they wanted, and adapt Masonic culture to fit their needs and beliefs.<sup>12</sup> This would allow them to continue interacting with other Masons<sup>13</sup> and incorporating more Jews into Masonry without giving up their connections to the Jewish community and Jewish faith.

In America, we see a version of this idea of a “Jewish lodge”,<sup>14</sup> although it was implemented very differently from the ones that we see in Europe. Lodges in America were accepting of Jews and readily allowed them to join. In fact, some of the most important Masons in America were Jewish.<sup>15</sup> The Jewish population in America was small yet, even in areas where few Jews settled, Jews were allowed to join Masonic lodges. One example of this is the acceptance of Moses Michael Hays into the Massachusetts Lodge in Boston in November 1782. That December he was elected

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<sup>11</sup> Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe 1723-1939*, 16.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 16-7.

<sup>13</sup> Membership in a lodge meant that you were welcomed in any lodge; Ibid., 17-8.

<sup>14</sup> I intentionally put “Jewish lodge” in quotations here. The American “Jewish lodge” differs from the European one because it is only the term that I am using to connect the two. In America, anyone could join a “Jewish lodge”, but its membership was primarily Jewish, at least for a period of time. As far as I can tell, they did not alter their practice of Masonry to fit their religion in the same way that the Europeans did, nor were they forced to start their own through discrimination.

<sup>15</sup> This will be elaborated on further in Chapter 3.



Master<sup>16</sup>, a position which he served in for three years, and then became the “Most Worshipful Grand Master” from 1788 to 1793.<sup>17</sup> To be fair, Hays was already an established Mason by the late 1700s and had been the Deputy Inspector General for Masonry for North America,<sup>18</sup> so his acceptance by the Boston Lodge is not equivalent to a Jewish non-Mason requesting admission. However, it is still notable that he was readily accepted, and even promoted, in a colony that was generally intolerant of religions other than Puritanism. This contrasted with what happened in Europe because, in America, there was no discussion of whether or not to accept Jews (possibly because this conversation had already happened in Europe); they just did.

Yet, despite the Masonic willingness to accept Jews, lodges that could be considered an American version of “Jewish lodges” appeared. These were lodges that don't appear to have changed their practices to incorporate Judaism the way some European Jewish lodges did, but still appear to have either entirely or largely Jewish membership. Two examples of this phenomenon are King David's Lodge in Newport, Rhode Island and the Sublime Lodge of Perfection in Philadelphia.

King David's Lodge is an interesting case because it was started in New York, but was moved to Newport. However, in both places, it had significant ties to the Jewish community. King David's Lodge of Freemasons received its warrant on February 17, 1769 from the Provincial Grand Master of New York, George Harrison Esq. Moses Michael Hays was appointed the first Master Mason of this lodge, which appears to have

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<sup>16</sup> This is more of an administrative title than a rank-based one.

<sup>17</sup> Julius F. Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: The New Era Printing Company, 1915), 22.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.; This is, again, an administrative title. However, it would not have been appointed if he was not respected within Masonry.

been entirely Jewish.<sup>19</sup> Hays is often considered the father of the Scottish Rite in America as he was appointed the Deputy Inspector General for the West Indies and North America by a Scottish Rite patent.<sup>20</sup> Thus, because he started King David's Lodge, it is not a stretch to believe that this lodge adopted the degree system of the Scottish Rite.<sup>21</sup>

Subsequently, Moses Michael Hays moved from New York and, eventually, was able to get the warrant for King David's Lodge transferred to Newport, where he was in residence. Hays was able to do this, in part, by citing the names of those who were interested in joining, many of whom were Jews.<sup>22</sup> These men included Moses Seixas and David Lopez, members of two of the most prominent Jewish families of the time who would, at least for their first meeting, serve as the Senior and Junior Wardens.<sup>23</sup> However, it is important to note that not all of the members of the Newport lodge were Jewish. The document also appoints non-Jews Jeremiah Clarke as Treasurer, and Henry Dayton as Secretary.<sup>24</sup> It goes on to say "Robert Elliot ; John Handy ; Peleg Clarke and Daniel Box were Modern Masons, but were truly desirous to be initiated into our Ancient Fraternity and that they were worthy thereof ; they were all accordingly entered as Apprentices and

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<sup>19</sup> Grand Lodge of New York, F. & A.M., *Official Exposition Record and History of Masonry in the State of New York in Connection with First Annual Fashion Exposition for the Benefit of Masonic Hospital Activities* (New York: Eaton & Gettinger, 1922), 49.

<sup>20</sup> Catherine Swanson, "A Brittle and Torn Manuscript: Conservation of an early Scottish Rite Patent," Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library, [http://nationalheritagemuseum.typepad.com/library\\_and\\_archives/moses-michael-hayes/](http://nationalheritagemuseum.typepad.com/library_and_archives/moses-michael-hayes/) (accessed November 15, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> The Sublime Lodge of Perfection in Philadelphia was also Scottish Rite. This will be elaborated on later in the chapter.

<sup>22</sup> Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*, 21-2.

<sup>23</sup> "From the East Cometh Light," in Henry W. Rugg, *History of Freemasonry in Rhode Island* (Providence: E.L. Freedman & Son, State Printers, 1895), 44.; Once again, these are administrative positions for the lodge, rather than ranking ones.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

afterwards passed to Fellow Craft.”<sup>25</sup> This is important to note because none of those new Apprentices were Jewish. In the shift from New York to Newport, the lodge went from being entirely Jewish to having several non-Jewish members. It is unclear whether the lodge in New York was entirely Jewish because they were exclusionary or because Christians decided to join other lodges. One thing is clear though: when the lodge moved to Newport it was no longer an entirely Jewish lodge.

This is an interesting phenomenon. Why don't Christians join the lodge in New York and why do they join in Newport? Because the exclusivity of the lodge in each place is unclear, it makes sense to look at the population and lodge data to try to get some insight into this occurrence. Although New York City is often credited with having the largest Jewish community during the colonial period,<sup>26</sup> the numbers of Jews are not that different between New York and Newport. In 1773, New York was home to about 242 Jews<sup>27</sup> while, in a census taken the next year in Newport recorded 200 Jews.<sup>28</sup> This is not a significantly different population so likely cannot be an excuse for exclusivity.

However, when the number of lodges in each city is introduced, a possible explanation appears. In New York City, there appear to be at least six other lodges that were in existence before King David's Lodge.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, in Newport, there only appears to have been one other lodge before King David's Lodge was moved there.<sup>30</sup> This is a possible explanation for why there were more Christians in the Newport iteration of

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<sup>25</sup> Rugg, *History of Freemasonry in Rhode Island*, 44.; These are the first two ranks in the Scottish Rite.

<sup>26</sup> Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000*, 27.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Marilyn Kaplan, "The Jewish Merchants of Newport, 1749-1790," *The Jews of Rhode Island*, Edited by George M. Goodwin and Ellen Smith (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2004), 16.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Ross, *A Standard History of Freemasonry in the State of New York including Lodge, Chapter, Council, Commandery and Scottish Rite Bodies* (New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1899), 4.; It is possible that not all of these were still in existence upon the arrival of King David's Lodge.

<sup>30</sup> Rugg, *History of Freemasonry in Rhode Island*, 34-43.

the lodge than in the New York one. Christians in New York had more variety to choose from and, thus, may not have joined King David's Lodge. This may have been prejudice (although it is unlikely considering that, under British rule, New York Jews were the only ones with the right to vote and hold office, a right that was affirmed by the independent state in 1777<sup>31</sup>), but was more likely a product of the variety of lodges that people could choose from. Many of these lodges were over a decade old by the time King David's Lodge received its warrant<sup>32</sup> and, thus, had been more established. Therefore, while Jews may have joined the same lodge because that was the network of people that they knew, there were plenty of options for others. This may have resulted in what appears to be a “Jewish lodge”.<sup>33</sup>

When the lodge moved to Newport, the only other option was St. John's Lodge, which had stopped holding meetings just before the outbreak of the Revolution.<sup>34</sup> The population of Newport was much smaller than the population of New York, so the existence of fewer lodges is unsurprising. However, the existence of only one other lodge, particularly one that was relatively inactive, gave the Masons who lived there little choice in how they could become involved in the organization. Thus, upon the arrival of King David's Lodge in 1780, it makes sense that Jews and non-Jews alike sought to join. This may explain the change in the demographics of this lodge between New York and Newport.

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<sup>31</sup> Pencak, *Jews & Gentiles in Early America*, 19.; The people who would have given these rights to Jews would have been powerful and, thus, part of the target population for Masons. That doesn't mean that they were definitely Masons, but chances are that, at least some of them, were

<sup>32</sup> Ross, *A Standard History of Freemasonry in the State of New York*, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Even though the members of this lodge were Jewish, chances are that they were still able to gain the connections discussed earlier through interactions with the other New York lodges. Once a Mason joins a lodge, they are part of the whole organization and other lodges are supposed to treat them as peers. Thus, joining a lodge with primarily Jewish membership did not remove the networks of non-Jews.

<sup>34</sup> Rugg, *History of Freemasonry in Rhode Island*, 41.

Within Newport, the proportion of Jews involved in Masonry is astounding.<sup>35</sup> When the membership of Newport lodges is compared to the estimated number of Jews living there, as recorded by Ezra Stiles (a contemporary who was fascinated with the Jewish community if somewhat disgusted by their religious practices) we find that most of the eligible Jews in Newport were involved in Masonry. The estimate that we get from Stiles that most closely coincides with the opening of King David's Lodge comes from 1770 when he estimated that there were about 30 Jewish families living in Newport. In 1774, there was an official census taken by order of the General Assembly that calculated about 25 Jewish families, or about 200 Jews living in Newport at the time.<sup>36</sup> Compared to the 15 Jews belonging to St. Johns Lodge midcentury, and the 16 who helped to organize King David's Lodge, even allowing for some overlap, it seems that most of the heads of the Jewish households in Newport belonged to a Masonic lodge.<sup>37</sup> While Jews may have been a small part of the population, only 2 percent of the total population of Newport,<sup>38</sup> they had a significant presence in the Masonic organization, in part, through primarily Jewish lodges like King David's Lodge.

We see a similarly “Jewish lodge” in Philadelphia with the Sublime Lodge of Perfection. This lodge is particularly notable because, according to Masonic Librarian Julius F. Sachse, when it first opened in 1781 all of the members were Jewish. However,

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<sup>35</sup> The membership numbers of Jewish Masons in New York has proven elusive, so I was unable to do a similar proportional study. However, from what I know, it seems that the situation was probably similar and most Jews in New York probably had a connection to Masonry, if they weren't Masons themselves. This assumption is based off of the similarity in the number of Jews in Newport and New York and how that would translate numerically to Jews eligible for Masonry (i.e. not children or women).

<sup>36</sup> Kaplan, "The Jewish Merchants of Newport, 1749-1790," 16.

<sup>37</sup> Pencak, *Jews & Gentiles in Early America*, 92.

<sup>38</sup> Kaplan, "The Jewish Merchants of Newport, 1749-1790," 16.

by the time that the surviving minute book<sup>39</sup> ends in 1789, all of the officers and most of the members were Christian.<sup>40</sup> In fact, the last mention of a definitively Jewish Mason being present at a meeting is on November 7, 1788, when Solomon Bush “installed Bro. Gavin Hamilton..., Bro. Asheton Humphreys..., [and] Bro., Benja. Mason” as the new leaders of the lodge.<sup>41</sup> This was three months before their final recorded meeting. Based on the names of the men listed at the beginning of the minute book and my knowledge of the Jewish families of this period, I question Sachse's assertion that all of the members were Jewish at the start of the lodge. While people like Samuel Myers and Moses Cohen were certainly Jews, it is unlikely that Thomas Randal was.<sup>42</sup> Still, the trend that he notes from a mostly, if not entirely, Jewish membership to a largely gentile membership is accurate.

This shift cannot be accounted for by a shift in location since the lodge did not move in that seven-year period, and it is unlikely that the other lodges in Philadelphia changed significantly enough to warrant such a change. Although it is unclear exactly which lodges were in existence upon the arrival of the Sublime Lodge of Perfection, there had been at least five other lodges up to that point.<sup>43</sup> To begin to understand this demographic change, we must look at where the lodge started. This lodge was established by a meeting of the Grand Council held on June 25, 1781, although

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<sup>39</sup> A minute book logs a general summary of each meeting of a lodge. It is not a detailed account, but states, generally, who was present and what happened.

<sup>40</sup> Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*, 35.

<sup>41</sup> “Minute Book for the Lodge of Grand Elect Perfect & Sublime Masons in the City of Philadelphia,” in *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>43</sup> Francis Vicente, “An Overview of Early Freemasonry in Pennsylvania,” *Pietre-Stones Review of Freemasonry*, [http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/pennsylvania\\_freemasonry.html](http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/pennsylvania_freemasonry.html) (accessed November 15, 2013).

arrangements for this lodge were not completed until the Autumn of 1782.<sup>44</sup> It was established as a Lodge of “Grand Elect Perfect & Sublime Masons”,<sup>45</sup> meaning that they followed the Sublime Rite practices, which would later be known as the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite.<sup>46</sup> The Scottish Rite was an innovation that went against the conservatism of the Grand Lodge of London. Not only did it add degrees, but members of the Scottish Rite believed that their lodges practiced a more pure form of Masonry that was more egalitarian as opposed to the Grand Lodge's oligarchy.<sup>47</sup>

Although Moses Michael Hays had introduced the Scottish Rite to America in 1768,<sup>48</sup> it is the Sublime Lodge of Perfection in Philadelphia that, through its membership, is given credit for popularizing it throughout the States.<sup>49</sup> This was, in part, because of the movement of Jews through this lodge and back to their original colonies.<sup>50</sup> At the first official meeting, recorded on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1782, of the 11 people listed as present, over half of them are decisively Jewish, and the two top officials, Isaac da Costa and Solomon Bush,<sup>51</sup> were both Jewish.<sup>52</sup>

The immediate question that we have to address is why there were so many Jews right from the beginning when it was not an exclusively Jewish lodge and other lodges

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<sup>44</sup> Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*, 29.

<sup>45</sup> “Minute Book for the Lodge of Grand Elect Perfect & Sublime Masons in the City of Philadelphia,” in *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>47</sup> Margaret C. Jacob, *The Origins of Freemasonry Facts & Fictions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 105.

<sup>48</sup> Harry L. Golden and Martin Rywell, *Jews in American History: Their Contribution To The United States, 1492-1950* (Charlotte, North Carolina: H.A. Stalls Printing Company, 1950), 27.

<sup>49</sup> Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*, 29.

<sup>50</sup> This was the result of the American Revolution, and will be explained in more detail later in the chapter.

<sup>51</sup> Both of these men will be further discussed in Chapter 3

<sup>52</sup> “Minute Book for the Lodge of Grand Elect Perfect & Sublime Masons in the City of Philadelphia,” in Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*, 41.

already existed. When we look at the rosters for other Philadelphia lodges which existed in the eighteenth-century, it is striking to note that the Jewish membership of the Sublime Lodge was an exceptional event.<sup>53</sup> Among the members of the Tun Tavern Lodge, a group that used the practices of Modern Freemasonry, very few, if any members were Jewish.<sup>54</sup> The same is observed with the roster of the Freemason's Lodge No. 2, another group of Moderns which was warranted by Benjamin Franklin.<sup>55</sup> To be fair, these lodges started much earlier than the Sublime Lodge of Perfection and they may not have overlapped with the Sublime Lodge. Still, this difference is important to note because it indicates that there was something different about the Sublime Lodge of Perfection, at least initially, that attracted more Jews.

One possibility for the large number of Jews in this lodge is the sheer number of Jews who were residing in Philadelphia at this time. While there had been a notable Jewish population in Philadelphia before the Revolution, it increased significantly as a result of the Revolution. During the war, many Jews fled to Philadelphia from the other major Jewish settlements in the colonies when their home cities were taken over by the British.<sup>56</sup> This was a particularly noticeable trend among the Jewish populations of New York and Charleston because most Jews in these areas were no longer loyal to the Crown.

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<sup>53</sup> In other colonies we don't see this same trend. It is possible that Jews belonged to other lodges which don't have surviving rosters.

<sup>54</sup> Julius Frederick Sachse, "Roster of the Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons Which Met at the Tun Tavern, Philadelphia," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 20, no. 1 (1896), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20085679> (accessed October 12, 2013).

<sup>55</sup> Julius F. Sachse, "Roster of the Freemason's Lodge of Philadelphia No. 2, of the Moderns," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 31, no. 1 (1907), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20085367> (accessed October 12, 2013).; To be clear, these estimates are based off of the names on the roster and they don't entirely discount the presence of Jews in these lodges. The name Isaac Meyers appears on the list of Lodge No. 2 and the last name Nunes appears on the list of Tun Tavern. Both of these could have been Jews as the Myers family and the Nones family were wealthy Jewish families at this time. However, the point that, if Jews were there, there weren't very many, still stands.

<sup>56</sup> Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000*, 47-8.



Thus, they fled when their cities were occupied by the British. Because this was a period where more Jews, many of whom were likely already Masons, came to Philadelphia, it would make sense that many of them would seek out a lodge to join upon arrival.

In addition, this would, at least partially, explain why the Jewish membership decreased over time because, after the end of the war, many of these Jews moved back to their original communities. This is part of what helped spread Scottish Rite Masonry through the colonies and is a reasonable explanation for why Jewish membership had drastically decreased in the Lodge of Perfection by 1788. This is illustrated by Isaac da Costa, a Charleston Jew who was one of the high ranking officers at the start of the Grand Lodge of Perfection, but who left Philadelphia to return to Charleston in Fall of 1782 where he organized his own Lodge of Perfection the following February.<sup>57</sup>

In conjunction with this, more Christians joined the lodge. By the end of the minute book in 1788, none of the names listed as present Masons were the same as the ones at the beginning.<sup>58</sup> This would seem to indicate a high level of turnover. This reflects a trend that we see among the Jewish population. People may have come to Philadelphia during the war because their communities were occupied by the British, but they left after the war. However, because there was a larger population of non-Jews in Philadelphia, these people were easily replaced. This was part of a period of immigration with relatively few Jews. The next wave of Jewish immigration wouldn't really appear until 1820.<sup>59</sup> This meant that more non-Jews were arriving in Philadelphia, replacing the Jews who were leaving. Although the two groups were never comparable in size, this

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<sup>57</sup> Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*, 32-3.

<sup>58</sup> "Minute Book for the Lodge of Grand Elect Perfect & Sublime Masons in the City of Philadelphia," in *Ibid.*, 41, 165.

<sup>59</sup> Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000*, 4.

affected the proportions of the population which would make it more likely for a non-Jew to join the lodge. The combination of Jews leaving and others arriving may help to explain the shift in the religious make up of this lodge.

### **Jews and Lodges in America**

Ultimately, what can be drawn from this information is that Jews used Freemasons largely as a way to connect with others and adapt to American society. They became involved in lodges, and even started their own, although these “Jewish lodges” were not as exclusive or as different as the lodges in Europe seemed to be. The tight networks of Jews were expanded, in part, through their interactions with non-Jews in Masonry and this offered them a higher social standing as well as more opportunities for business. These interactions can be seen in events such as the Gentile funding of Mikveh Israel, and even in the willingness of President Washington to support the Jewish community in Newport. Clearly, if the President of the United States was responding to this group, they were seen to have some significance.

Although lodges appeared that had predominately Jewish membership, most of these, eventually, were able to incorporate a more diverse demographic group, and some even ended up without many Jews. Still, even in lodges with significantly Jewish membership, the networks of non-Jews were still open to them. Once they became Masons, Jews were welcomed at different lodges and could freely travel and form relationships with non-Jews as Masonic brothers. Therefore, joining a lodge with other Jews allowed Jews to use their existing network to gain access to another network.

Jewish attraction to Masonry through lodges is understandable. It provided opportunities for them, and the presence of other Jewish Masons allowed them a comfortable environment. For Masons, the advantage at a lodge based level is a little bit less clear. In America, the clearest connection is through the Scottish Rite. Although this was not a characteristically Jewish part of Masonry, the involvement of Moses Michael Hays, a Jew, as Deputy Inspector General for Masonry for North America through a Scottish Rite patent linked the two. Thus, the advantage for Masonry of Jewish involvement in lodges was the spread of the Scottish Rite.

### **Chapter Three: American Jewish Freemasons**

Ultimately, no understanding of how Jews interacted within the Masonic organization would be complete without a look at some of the most important American Jewish Masons. Jewish Masons in America tended to be elites who were also part of other civic organizations and were considered significant within their communities. They were not isolated to just the Jewish community, but branched out, in part through joining the Masons, but also in a variety of other spheres including through merchant networks and through government.

For the purposes of examining this relationship, this section will focus on three men (Moses Michael Hays, Solomon Bush, and Isaac da Costa) from different regions of the country who represent three of the five major cities where Jews settled. These men, in particular, show how participation in Masonry did not preclude involvement in the Jewish community. In fact, many Jews who were involved in Masonry also served in leadership positions within their Jewish communities. These three men show us how, despite our modern perceptions, there was no contradiction for a Jew at the time between practicing their religion and becoming a Mason.

#### **Moses Michael Hays**

Moses Michael Hays is often considered one of the most important American Masons and the most important Jew in American Freemasonry. He is credited with spreading the Sublime, or Scottish Rite across America<sup>1</sup> through his efforts to depute

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<sup>1</sup> Julius F. Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: The New Era Printing Company, 1915), 19.

fellow, well-known brethren across states.<sup>2</sup> This created a network that was actively working to introduce Masons to the Sublime Rite, thus spreading its influence as quickly and efficiently as possible. Hays was also given several important titles throughout his time in the Masonic brotherhood including Grand Master of Sublime Masonry<sup>3</sup> and Most Worshipful Grand Master of the Massachusetts Lodge in Boston.<sup>4</sup> He was also an involved member of the Jewish community and continued to practice his religion until the day he died, something that could not be said for all Jews of the time. His ability to participate in these communities in meaningful ways enriches our understanding of how, on an individual level, the Jewish and Masonic communities interacted.

Hays was born to Judah Hays and Rebecca Michaels Hays in 1739. The Hays family was one of the most important Jewish families in New York with connections to other wealthy Jewish families across the colonies through marriage. This family network gave him access to a large network of Jews which, in turn, provided economic and religious opportunities for him. As a young man, he was involved in his father's successful import and export business<sup>5</sup> and was a prominent member of the New York congregation Shearith Israel. As part of this congregation, he served as Second Parnas<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>5</sup> William Weisberger, "Hays, Moses Michael," *American National Biography Online* (Sept. 2000), <http://www.anb.org/articles/01/01-00388.html> (accessed October 28, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> The closest thing to a parnas today is the President of a congregation. At the time, they held both religious and administrative duties, but were a lay leader, rather than a rabbi. via *Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Parnas (colloquially pronounced parnes)," <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11915-parnas> (accessed November 5, 2013).

and as a Trustee.<sup>7</sup> On August 13, 1766, he married Rachel Myers, a member of another well-known Jewish family.

Two years later, he is credited as introducing the Sublime Rite degrees of Freemasonry to the American colonies. At the same time, he was appointed Deputy Inspector General of Masonry for North America by Henry Andrew Francken.<sup>8</sup> This deputation on December 6, 1768 is the earliest Masonic record that we have of Moses Michael Hays. It reads:

Our Dear Brother, Moses M. Hays, (of the Jewish nation, native, inhabitant and merchant of the city and province of New York, in North America,) is known and approved Master Mason of the Blue Lodge, Grand Elected, Perfect, and Sublime Mason, Knight of the East and Prince of Jerusalem, &ca. &ca &ca And, that having with firmness, and constancy, sustained the brightness of the Grand Luminary, and given us the most solid proofs of his fervency, constancy, and zeal, in support of the Royal Craft, and his submission to the Supreme Tribunal of the Sovereign Princes of the Royal Secret; We have initiated him Patriarch, Noachite, Sovereign Knight of the Sun...we have consented to grant, constitute, and appoint our said dear brother Moses M. Hays, by these presents, Deputy Inspector General and Grand Master of and over all Lodges of the Royal Arch, Grand Elected and Perfect Masons, Councils of the Knights of the East, and Princes of Jerusalem, &ca. &ca &ca...and hereby give him full power to constitute Lodges of Royal Arch and Perfection, also Councils, and Grand Councils of Knights of the East...in the West Indies and North America.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to note that, in their description of Hays, they mention that he is a member of the Jewish “nation”. This is used to describe him separately from the fact that he is native to New York, thus describing his ethnic, and perhaps religious, identity.

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<sup>7</sup> Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*, 19.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.; Some Masonic historians speculate that Francken, as well as Brother Stephen Morin who introduced the Sublime Rite from France to San Domingo, were Jewish. However, there is no evidence that this is the case. Unlike Hays, their religion is not explicitly mentioned in Masonic texts.

<sup>9</sup> Deputation of Moses Michael Hays, December 6, 1768 quoted in Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*, 20.

By contrast, when Abraham Forst, another Masonic Jew, received his deputation from Moses Michael Hays, he was not defined by his religion.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps this is because the appointment was being bestowed from one Jew to another, or perhaps Hays felt that mentioning their shared religion would be counter to the religiously tolerant nature of Masonry. Nevertheless, the mention of religion at all on Hay's deputation is significant because it shows that, although Freemasons allowed people into their organization regardless of their religious affiliation, they still felt it was noteworthy as a mark of identity. That being said, there is no indication that his religion limited him, either in access or in rank, within the Masonic fraternity. The ease with which it was allowed to be left off of the Forst patent reinforces the relative insignificance of religion within Masonry. After all, if it was important, someone would likely have insisted that it appear.

In 1769, Hays organized King David's Lodge of Freemasons in New York. The warrant for this was issued by Provincial Grand Master of New York George Harrison Esq., and made Moses Michael Hays its first Master Mason.<sup>11</sup> However, the next year, he and his family moved to Newport, Rhode Island, another major city for Early American Jews. Jews were already established in Newport's Masonic community, with 15 belonging to St. John's Lodge in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>12</sup> The initial leaders of this lodge were all Christians who wanted a lodge that would be easily accessible. By May

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<sup>10</sup> "Health, Stability and Power By the Glory of Ye Grand Architect of the Universe Lux Ex Tenebris" in Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*, 15-7.

<sup>11</sup> Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*, 21.

<sup>12</sup> William Pencak, *Jews & Gentiles in Early America, 1654-1800* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 92.

1763, there had been 22 candidates accepted to the lodge.<sup>13</sup> It is unclear exactly how this lines up chronologically with the 15 Jews in the lodge, but it certainly indicates that a significant proportion of the lodge was Jewish.

In 1780, Hays was able to move King David's Lodge from New York to Newport under the same warrant. He did this, in part, by citing the names of those who would serve as the lodge's leadership, many of whom were Jews<sup>14</sup> and some of whom transferred their membership from St. John's Lodge.<sup>15</sup> King David's Lodge flourished and, until the Jewish community in Newport split apart in the 1790s, many of the members and officers of King David's Lodge were Jews. Jews may have been a small section of the population, only 2 percent in Newport,<sup>16</sup> but, it seems that most of the ones who were eligible for membership in the Masonic fraternity, joined this lodge. On October 19, 1790, as the Jewish community split apart, St. John's Lodge and King David's Lodge agreed to merge, adopting the name of St. John's Lodge and creating a membership that was 141 strong, with the leadership incorporating Jews (Moses Seixas) and non-Jews (John Breese and John Topham) alike.<sup>17</sup>

It is unclear exactly when, but during the 1780s, Hays moved to Boston, possibly to start over after the economic difficulties that many Jewish merchants had faced prior to

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<sup>13</sup> Robert E. Brinton and John M. Johnston, "The History of St. John's Lodge No.1," St. John's Lodge No. 1, [http://www.stjohnslodgeno1.com/Lodge\\_History.html](http://www.stjohnslodgeno1.com/Lodge_History.html) (accessed December 1, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*, 21-2.

<sup>15</sup> Brinton and Johnston, "The History of St. John's Lodge No.1," St. John's Lodge No. 1, [http://www.stjohnslodgeno1.com/Lodge\\_History.html](http://www.stjohnslodgeno1.com/Lodge_History.html).

<sup>16</sup> Marilyn Kaplan, "The Jewish Merchants of Newport, 1749-1790," *The Jews of Rhode Island*, Edited by George M. Goodwin and Ellen Smith (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2004), 16.

<sup>17</sup> Brinton and Johnston, "The History of St. John's Lodge No.1," St. John's Lodge No. 1, [http://www.stjohnslodgeno1.com/Lodge\\_History.html](http://www.stjohnslodgeno1.com/Lodge_History.html).



the Revolution.<sup>18</sup> While in Boston he became involved in brokerage and insurance and owned a shipping office and counting house with his son Judah.<sup>19</sup> Here he became the first Jewish benefactor of Harvard College<sup>20</sup> and, from 1788 to 1793, he served as the Most Worshipful Grand Master of the Lodge in Boston.<sup>21</sup> Boston, while a major city of the era, was not a major Jewish city, in part because the Puritans were not tolerant of other religions. He became successful here despite his religion, since he did not have the large Jewish network of support here that he had had in Newport and New York. Eventually, on May 9, 1805, he died at his home in Boston and his remains were taken to Newport to be buried in the Jewish cemetery there.<sup>22</sup>

At the time of his death, he was generally very well remembered. His death notice was published in no fewer than seven newspapers in Massachusetts alone. Many of these articles read similarly, mentioning his admirable character, his strong intellect, his love for all men, and his virtuous life.<sup>23</sup> The fact that his death notice was so wide spread and that, in most cases, so much space was dedicated to a recounting of his

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<sup>18</sup> Kaplan, "The Jewish Merchants of Newport, 1749-1790," 20.

<sup>19</sup> Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*, 23.

<sup>20</sup> Harry L. Golden and Martin Rywell, *Jews in American History: Their Contribution To The United States, 1492-1950* (Charlotte, North Carolina: H.A. Stalls Printing Company, 1950), 29.

<sup>21</sup> Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*, 22.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>23</sup> *Columbian Centinel*, May 11, 1805, <http://www.readex.com/content/early-american-newspapers-1690-1922> (accessed October 25, 2013).; *Independent Chronicle*, May 13, 1805, <http://www.readex.com/content/early-american-newspapers-1690-1922> (accessed October 25, 2013).; *Boston Commercial Gazette*, May 13, 1805, <http://www.readex.com/content/early-american-newspapers-1690-1922> (accessed October 25, 2013).; *Repertory*, May 14, 1805, <http://www.readex.com/content/early-american-newspapers-1690-1922> (accessed October 25, 2013).; *New England Palladium*, May 14, 1805, <http://www.readex.com/content/early-american-newspapers-1690-1922> (accessed October 25, 2013).; *Newburyport Herald*, May 14, 1805, <http://www.readex.com/content/early-american-newspapers-1690-1922> (accessed October 25, 2013).

character, was probably both an expression of how well known he was and how respected he was in the greater community, thus, making his death a noteworthy event.

Robert Treat Paine Jr., the son of a signer of the Declaration of Independence, even wrote an elegiac sonnet inscribed to his memory.<sup>24</sup> It is interesting to note that, within this poem, there is no mention of his religion. Instead, he is described as “Man of Soul” and Treat Paine recalls his “Wit” and “Friendship.”<sup>25</sup> It is interesting that religion was not something that Treat Paine used to define Hays. This may have been the context of their friendship. Treat Paine was a fellow Mason,<sup>26</sup> so it was possible that their interactions were religiously neutral. That may not have been something that was part of Hays' identity to Treat Paine. Instead, it was their friendship and his virtuous qualities that he chose to memorialize in this poem. It is clear that, in his life, he was loved and admired by all, both Jew and Gentile.

### **Solomon Bush**

Philadelphia was the hub for American Jews during the Revolution, many of whom were patriots and found safety among Philadelphians when their hometowns were captured by the British. Philadelphia was also a hub for Masons. It was one of the most enlightened cities in the colonies with many intellectual organizations, including the Masons. Solomon Bush was a Philadelphia resident, both prior to and after the Revolution, and was well known in Philadelphia for his Masonic involvement and for his

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<sup>24</sup> Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*, 26.

<sup>25</sup> *Elegiac Sonnet Inscribed to the Memory of M. M. Hays, Esq.*, American Jewish Archives, [http://americanjewisharchives.org/publications/journal/PDF/1956\\_08\\_01\\_00\\_doc\\_paine.pdf](http://americanjewisharchives.org/publications/journal/PDF/1956_08_01_00_doc_paine.pdf) (accessed June 5, 2013)

<sup>26</sup> "Famous Masons." Mariner Lodge No. 2. <http://www.marinerlodge2afm.org/page4.htm> (accessed November 5, 2013).

heroism during the American Revolution. Not much is known about his early life, but his role within the Sublime Lodge of Perfection in Philadelphia is well documented.

Solomon Bush was born in Philadelphia to Mathias Bush, a prominent Philadelphia merchant, and Tabitha Mears on October 13, 1753. There is very little additional information about Solomon Bush's early life until 1776 when he “distinguished himself” as part of the Pennsylvania militia “when the service was Critical & Hazardous”.<sup>27</sup> This was most likely through his participation in the 'Flying Camp of Associators of Pennsylvania', troops that served on the front lines and bore the brunt of most attacks,<sup>28</sup> and his participation in the Battle of Long Island.<sup>29</sup>

On July 5, 1777, the Supreme Council of Pennsylvania appointed him adjutant-general of the state militia, making him its chief administrative officer. This was significant because it was a promotion in response to his work on the front lines. He was singled out for being a good soldier, despite his religion and his relative youth. However, in September of that year, he had to be taken to Chestnut Hill after being wounded in the thigh during a skirmish. He wrote of this injury in a letter to his friend Henry Lazarus in November 1777 saying “I suppose you heard of my being wounded the 18<sup>th</sup> of Sept when with difficulty was brot home in a most deplorable condition with my thigh broke, and the surgeons pronounced my wound Mortal.”<sup>30</sup> The next month he was imprisoned by

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<sup>27</sup> Pennsylvania Colonial Records, XXI, 140 quoted in Edwin Wolf and Maxwell Whiteman, *The history of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial times to the Age of Jackson* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1957), 83.

<sup>28</sup> "Revolutionary War Records at the Pennsylvania State Archives," Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, [http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/revolutionary\\_war/3852](http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/revolutionary_war/3852) (accessed November 15, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Peter Egill Brownfeld, "From Private to Colonel: Jewish Service in the Revolutionary War," The American Council for Judaism, [http://www.acjna.org/acjna/articles\\_detail.aspx?id=405](http://www.acjna.org/acjna/articles_detail.aspx?id=405) (accessed November 1, 2013).

<sup>30</sup> Solomon Bush to Henry Lazarus, Chestnut Hill, Nov. 15, 1777, MS quoted in Wolf and Whiteman, *The history of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial times to the Age of Jackson*, 84.

the British Army, but was released in exchange for British prisoners held by the Continental army. Because of his injury, he could not work, so, on October 27, 1779, the supreme council of Pennsylvania promoted Bush to lieutenant-colonel which provided a salary.<sup>31</sup> With this promotion, Solomon Bush became the most militarily distinguished Jew in the Revolution.<sup>32</sup>

After his military service, his interest was in government. He applied for a number of federally appointed positions including the Secretary of the Treasury, the Naval Officer for the Port of Philadelphia, and the Postmaster-General of the United States. Although he was unsuccessful at gaining any of these federal roles, he was the first Jew to be considered for a Cabinet position. On a local level, he found more success, with his name appearing in various Pennsylvania newspapers as part of local committees or other governmental organizations, including the Grand Inquest of Montgomery County and “a meeting of the delegates from a majority of the townships of the county of Philadelphia.”<sup>33</sup>

In addition to becoming involved in government, Bush got involved in Masonry. Although it is not exactly clear when Bush first became a Mason, in 1781, he was made the Deputy Inspector General of Masonry for Pennsylvania by Moses Michael Hays.<sup>34</sup> The role of the Deputy Inspector General was administrative and unrelated to the degree

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<sup>31</sup> *Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Bush, Solomon,” <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3852-bush-solomon> (accessed November 5, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> Pencak, *Jews & Gentiles in Early America, 1654-1800*, 203.

<sup>33</sup> “Germantown, February 14, 1785,” *Pennsylvania Packet*, February 17, 1785, <http://www.readex.com/content/early-american-newspapers-1690-1922> (accessed October 25, 2013).; “The Grand Inquest of Montgomery County, for May Term 1793,” *General Advertiser*, May 17, 1793, <http://www.readex.com/content/early-american-newspapers-1690-1922> (accessed October 25, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Wolf and Whiteman, *The history of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial times to the Age of Jackson*, 155.

of Masonry that one had achieved.<sup>35</sup> They were the ones who oversaw the lodges in their assigned area. Soon, he was made a Grand Master<sup>36</sup> and is recorded as being “in the Chair” at almost every meeting of the Sublime Lodge of Perfection from 1782 to 1788.<sup>37</sup> In November 1788, he resigned as Grand Master of the Sublime Lodge of Perfection for the purposes of connecting the Pennsylvania Grand Lodge with the Ancient and Modern Grand Lodges in England.<sup>38</sup>

Soon after his return, he married Nancy Marshall, daughter of the wealthy Christopher Marshall Jr.<sup>39</sup> His marriage to a non-Jew was an indicator of his gradual assimilation and separation from his Jewish roots. While he had given money to aid the construction of Mikveh Israel in 1782,<sup>40</sup> upon his death in 1796, by his request, he was buried in the Quaker Friends burial ground in Germantown.<sup>41</sup> This early death was, in part, a result of complications from the injury that he had sustained during the war. It is interesting to note that his death notice states that he bore his illness with “uncommon christian fortitude”, even though he was not Christian.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, s.v. “Sovereign Grand Inspector-General,” <http://encyclopediaoffreemasonry.com/s/sovereign-grand-inspector-general/> (accessed November 5, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> Wolf and Whiteman, *The history of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial times to the Age of Jackson*, 155.

<sup>37</sup> “Minute Book for the Lodge of Grand Elect Perfect & Sublime Masons in the City of Philadelphia,” in Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*, 41-161.

<sup>38</sup> Wolf and Whiteman, *The history of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial times to the Age of Jackson*, 156.

<sup>39</sup> *Independent Gazetteer*, April 9, 1791, <http://www.readex.com/content/early-american-newspapers-1690-1922> (accessed October 25, 2013).; Wolf and Whiteman, *The history of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial times to the Age of Jackson*, 157.

<sup>40</sup> *Jewish Virtual Library*, s.v. “Bush, Solomon,” [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0004\\_0\\_03772.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0004_0_03772.html) (accessed November 5, 2013).

<sup>41</sup> *Philadelphia Minerva*, June 13, 1795, <http://www.readex.com/content/early-american-newspapers-1690-1922> (accessed October 25, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

Although he chose not to be buried in the Jewish cemetery, there is no evidence that he ever formally converted or even that he cast off Judaism. Therefore, it is interesting that they used the word “christian” to describe him when, even Jews who did formally convert, could not escape their association with the Jewish nation.<sup>43</sup> In addition, his death notice describes him as “a good husband...a true patriot and friend of mankind.”<sup>44</sup> It is clear that he was perceived fondly by his peers and that the religion that he identified himself with had relatively little impact on his life, both within and outside of Masonry.

### **Isaac da Costa**

Isaac da Costa was an important Mason, but primarily in his hometown of Charleston, South Carolina. He did spend some time in Philadelphia during the Revolution and his name appears as Grand Warden in accounts found in the minute book of the Sublime Lodge of Perfection in Philadelphia,<sup>45</sup> but he was one of the Jews who quickly returned to Charleston after the Revolutionary War ended.

Similarly to Solomon Bush, we know little about the early life of Isaac da Costa. We do know that he was born to Joseph and Sarah da Costa in London in 1722, and that he married his wife, also named Sarah, in 1745. It is not exactly clear when he came to the colonies, although it seems to have been around 1750 since he was about 29 at the

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<sup>43</sup> One example is David Franks who, although he formally converted, was still commonly referred to as a member of the Jewish nation.

<sup>44</sup> *Philadelphia Minerva*, June 13, 1795, <http://www.readex.com/content/early-american-newspapers-1690-1922>.

<sup>45</sup> “Minute Book for the Lodge of Grand Elect Perfect & Sublime Masons in the City of Philadelphia,” in Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*, 41-161.

time of his arrival.<sup>46</sup> Upon arrival, he seems to have settled in Charleston, South Carolina and become a merchant, an occupation that would have connected him to many prominent people across the colonies, particularly other Jews.

He also quickly became involved in the new congregation that was forming in Charleston around the time of his arrival. Between 1750 and 1757, this Congregation, known as Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, met in a small home to pray.<sup>47</sup> Isaac Da Costa was the first hazan, or reader, of the congregation. This role is the equivalent of the modern cantor, meaning that he led prayers and read the Torah at services. This was a vital role for the congregation and was an honor that would not have been taken lightly. At this time, most of the religious leaders in America were lay-leaders who had received some education, rather than formally trained rabbis.<sup>48</sup> Thus, these men were the leaders of their local Jewish communities. Da Costa served in this role until 1764, when he resigned.<sup>49</sup> During his tenure, his family bought a cemetery in Charleston and gave it to the congregation in 1762, leaving a legacy that would remain important to the congregation for years to come.<sup>50</sup>

As he got involved in the Jewish community, da Costa also joined the Masonic fraternity. By 1753, he was a member of King Solomon's Lodge of Charleston, making him the first Jewish Mason, that we know of, in South Carolina.<sup>51</sup> In 1759, he was made the treasurer of King Solomon's Lodge. He remained involved in this lodge until 1781

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<sup>46</sup> Charles Reznikoff, *The Jews of Charleston: A History of an American Jewish Community* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1950), 15.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>48</sup> Wolf and Whiteman, *The history of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial times to the Age of Jackson*, 128.

<sup>49</sup> Reznikoff, *The Jews of Charleston*, 47.

<sup>50</sup> Pencak, *Jews & Gentiles in Early America, 1654-1800* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 123.

<sup>51</sup> Samuel Oppenheim, "The Jews and Masonry in the United States before 1810," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* (1910): 76.

when he refused to take the oath of allegiance to the occupying British forces. As a result, he was banned from Charleston and had all of his property confiscated.<sup>52</sup> Needing somewhere to go, he and his family moved to Philadelphia along with fellow banished Jew Benjamin Nones and eight other Jews. The Jews of South Carolina were overwhelmingly supportive of the patriot cause. Of the 56 men in Charleston at the time who were definitively identifiable as Jewish, 36 of them identified as patriots, with 26 officially enlisting in units of the Continental Army.<sup>53</sup> Thus, it was not surprising that da Costa was dedicated enough to the patriot cause to risk banishment.

In 1783, da Costa returned to Charleston, but, in the approximately two years that he spent in Philadelphia, he left his mark. Upon arrival, he recreated, to the best of his abilities, his life in Charleston, getting involved in the Jewish and Masonic communities that existed in Philadelphia. On June 25, 1781, at a meeting to establish the Sublime Lodge of Perfection in Philadelphia, Isaac da Costa is listed as present and as “Grand Warden, Inspector General for the W.I. [West Indies] and North America”.<sup>54</sup> In the next entry, he is listed as the Chair, followed by the Grand Warden in the next few entries,<sup>55</sup> and stops appearing in the minute book of the Sublime Lodge of Perfection after the entry on October 31, 1782.<sup>56</sup> Considering that the next entry is in 1784 and da Costa went back to Charleston in 1783, this absence of his name is not surprising.

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<sup>52</sup> Reznikoff, *The Jews of Charleston*, 50.

<sup>53</sup> Pencak, *Jews & Gentiles in Early America, 1654-1800* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 125.

<sup>54</sup> “Minute Book for the Lodge of Grand Elect Perfect & Sublime Masons in the City of Philadelphia,” in Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*, 40.

<sup>55</sup> These are all administrative, rather than ranking, titles.

<sup>56</sup> “Minute Book for the Lodge of Grand Elect Perfect & Sublime Masons in the City of Philadelphia,” in Sachse, *Ancient Documents relating to the A. and A. Scottish Rite in the Archives of the Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania*, 40-7.



He also became involved in Jewish life in Philadelphia. In 1782, he became one of the original members of Congregation Mikveh Israel.<sup>57</sup> During the years between the start of the Revolution and the time that the Treaty of Paris was signed ending it, the Philadelphia Jewish community underwent intense change. This was, in part, due to the threefold increase in the Jewish population between 1765 and 1775 as a result of the arrival of refugees from many different colonies.<sup>58</sup> These refugees brought ideas from their communities, particularly the New York community which already had strong connections to the Jews of Philadelphia, which were implemented in their new home. One such idea was the formal election of officers and established rules for the congregation. As part of the implementation of this policy, Isaac da Costa was appointed as chairman pro tempore, and helped to create the structure of Mikveh Israel.<sup>59</sup>

However, despite his involvement and dedication to these Jewish and Masonic organizations, he moved back to Charleston in 1783, almost as soon as he was able to. Just as he had brought some ideas to Philadelphia, da Costa brought some Philadelphia ideas back to Charleston. In February 1783, after being appointed Deputy Inspector General of Masonry for South Carolina by Moses Michael Hays, he started a Sublime Lodge of Perfection in Charleston.<sup>60</sup> His membership in the Sublime Lodge of Philadelphia almost certainly influenced his decision to start his own in Charleston, a

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<sup>57</sup> Oppenheim, "The Jews and Masonry in the United States before 1810," 76.

<sup>58</sup> Wolf and Whiteman, *The history of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial times to the Age of Jackson*, 114.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>60</sup> Oppenheim, "The Jews and Masonry in the United States before 1810," 76.

lodge that would continue in existence for many years and would help to establish Sublime Rite Masonry in the South.<sup>61</sup>

Despite some small changes, da Costa sought to return to his previous life when he returned to Charleston. In April 1783, he bought an advertisement informing people of his return and his intent to continue “on the Commission and the Vendue business, at his Store No. 36, on the Bay, where he is provided with every necessary Store for the reception of all kinds of goods.”<sup>62</sup> This served as both an advertisement for his business and a public notice that he had returned after being away for two years. Unfortunately, he would not be around for long.

In November 1783, he died in Charleston, less than a year after his return. Upon his death, another Jew, Joseph M. Myers, was appointed by Moses Michael Hays as his replacement in the role of Deputy Inspector General of Masonry for South Carolina. Da Costa's son, Joseph da Costa, would continue to be involved in Masonry.<sup>63</sup> While nothing was published after da Costa's death that was quite as elaborate as what was published after the deaths of Hays and Bush, the short line referencing his death is kind. It reads “Mr. ISAAC DA-COSTA...a respectable citizen and an honest man.”<sup>64</sup> This is not distinguished in any way from the other deaths listed on that day, but it does reflect the positive way that people saw him.

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<sup>61</sup> It is unclear how this lodge interacted with Solomon's Lodge and other lodges that had appeared in Charleston. In 1783, the York Rite also came to Charleston, creating tensions between Masonic groups, but this seems to be separate from the appearance of the Sublime Lodge of Perfection. Via Albert G. Mackey, *The History of Freemasonry in South Carolina, from its origin in the year 1736 to the present time*, (Columbia, South Carolina: South Carolinian Steam Power Press, 1861), 55.

<sup>62</sup> *South-Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser*, April 26, 1783, <http://www.readex.com/content/early-american-newspapers-1690-1922> (accessed October 25, 2013).

<sup>63</sup> Oppenheim, "The Jews and Masonry in the United States before 1810," 76.

<sup>64</sup> *South Carolina Weekly Gazette*, November 28, 1783, <http://www.readex.com/content/early-american-newspapers-1690-1922> (accessed October 25, 2013).

There is nothing about his religion in this notice, something that is unsurprising in the context of Masonry, but the fact that something was published at all is an indicator of both his social status and his public persona. He seems to have been well respected and trusted. He was able to participate freely in both Masonry and the Jewish community, no matter where he went, without sacrificing either one or his reputation.

### **Jewish Freemasons**

Each of these men is an example of Jews in specific American regions who had an impact on both their local Jewish community as well as their local Masonic community. As is to be expected, there is a varying amount known about all of them and not all of them contributed equally, yet all were seen as significant and important members of the community by their contemporaries.

One thing that is important to note is the interrelatedness of all of them, through the Jewish networks, but also through Masonic connections. For example, Solomon Bush and Isaac da Costa served together as Masons in the Sublime Lodge of Perfection in Philadelphia, a lodge which Hays had authorized and had helped to create through his involvement in the spread of Sublime Rite Masonry. This interaction was something that happened largely as a consequence of the Revolution and circumstances which caused Jews to centralize in Philadelphia. As well off merchants and traders, as well as prominent members of their local Jewish communities, there were already networks that stretched across colonies to connect these men, but the Revolution and their Masonic brotherhood helped to facilitate these previously existing relations.

Another important similarity was that these men were important in both their Masonic organizations as well as their Jewish ones. They held important titles and were very involved in both groups. Rather than arguing that one influenced the other, it is more likely that this is an indicator of their general status and level of education and wealth. Masons tended to be members of the elite class and lay leaders of the Jewish community were required to have a certain amount of education as a traditional rabbi was highly educated. The elite classes were the ones who could afford to educate their children; therefore, it makes sense that, in the limited scope of Jewish Masons, there would be overlap.

Ultimately, what is most important to note is that these men could all participate equally in both the Jewish and Masonic communities without having to choose one. While people like Solomon Bush gradually became less connected to Judaism, Moses Michael Hays and Isaac da Costa retained their Jewish connections. For people like Bush it was a choice and not an obligation. This is important to note because we normally see these two groups as opposed. We are surprised when we find people who are members of both groups. However, as evidenced by these three men, across colonies, this seemed to be standard. Masons lived up to their declarations of being a non-religious organization in America and didn't require Jews to choose or change. This also benefitted Masons because it helped to affirm their assertions of Enlightenment ideals and attracted some of the most active members of their organization, facilitating the spread of Masonry into a new community and across the states.

## **Conclusion**

The connections between Jews and Masons in early America are interesting precisely because we find them so surprising. People today are shocked to find out that there were Jewish Masons, let alone that some of the most important Masons of the eighteenth century were Jews. This is likely, in part, a product of the mystery of the Masonic organization as a whole. The only thing that the general population knows about Masonry is that it is a secret fraternity<sup>1</sup> and that many of our founding fathers were members. This may be the key to why the fact that there were Jewish Masons is so surprising to people. If the only Masons that people know of are Christians, then they may assume that all Masons are Christian. In addition, the modern assertions that our founders wanted to establish a Christian country, whether or not historically accurate, would seem to indicate that Christianity was something that would be fundamental to the groups that they joined.

Yet, as should now be clear, the Jewish and Masonic organizations were naturally connected. At all levels of Masonry, there were things that attracted Jews to Masonry and that encouraged Masons to accept Jews. Most generally, some of the most important Masonic symbols had Jewish significance and, most importantly, did not conflict with Jewish beliefs. For the Masons, Jewish involvement in their organization helped give legitimacy to their claims of antiquity and the connections that they claimed to have to the Old Testament.

At a more local level, there were lodges that were largely made up of Jews that were able to bring more Jews into the organization. Because most Jews were urban elites

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<sup>1</sup> Some Masons deny that they are a secret society, but, considering that their rituals aren't public, it is fair to at least classify them as a secretive society.

and middle class shopkeepers (the classes that Masons drew from) it was natural that some Jews would join the organization. Yet, it was the presence of fellow Jews at the head of the fraternity that made it so popular among the Jews of early America. Jewish involvement in lodges also helped Masons by spreading the Scottish Rite. Although not all Masons favored this form of Masonry, and although there was nothing particularly Jewish about its character, in America it was spread largely through the movement of Jews and under Jewish leadership. Spreading the Scottish Rite attracted more Brothers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, and helped the organization to grow throughout the states.

Finally, in looking at the experiences of individual Jewish Masons, it becomes apparent that Jews, both religious and otherwise, could participate in Freemasonry without it conflicting with their Jewish involvement and beliefs. In fact, many important Masons also had significant roles within their local Jewish communities. This was an attraction to Masonry for Jews because it did not force them to choose. Instead, they could freely continue the practice of their religion while enjoying the benefits of Masonry. By allowing Jews to become Masons, the Masonic organization was able to access a new community as well as obtain some of its most involved members. In several sources Moses Michael Hays is highlighted, not only for his religion, but for the work that he did establishing lodges and appointing officers. If Masons had excluded Jews, they would have limited the growth of their organization, in addition to contradicting their espoused values.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> To be clear, just because we know that it would be a contradiction of their values, doesn't mean that they would necessarily have seen it that way. Still, when the principle of religious toleration is written into something as fundamental as a Constitution, it is hard to deny that failure to comply would be a contradiction.

The presence of Jews in American Masonry is important to study precisely because their religion was relatively unimportant within the organization. While this point may occasionally be lost in an attempt to find connections between the two groups, it should not be forgotten. The average Jew in America during this time, despite enjoying more rights than they had in Europe, was still denied basic political rights.<sup>3</sup> For example, after petitioning for naturalization in 1761 under the Naturalization Act of 1740, a group of Rhode Island Jews were rejected by both the Rhode Island legislature and Superior Court. Rhode Island had espoused religious toleration, and they followed through,<sup>4</sup> but they clearly did not view Jews as equals.<sup>5</sup> Some states wouldn't give Jews the right to vote until into the nineteenth century and Maryland didn't allow Jews to hold public office until 1826.<sup>6</sup> Yet, within Masonry, Jews were equals. Perhaps because of the exclusivity of Masons in regards to social status, religion and other classifications became less important.

It is through their Masonic connections that Jews are able to petition effectively for their equal rights. In President George Washington's response to the famous letter that congregation Yeshuat Israel sent in 1790, he wrote:

The citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy—a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it were the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights, for, happily, the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its

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<sup>3</sup> New York was the only exception.

<sup>4</sup> Religious tolerance is different than acceptance of people despite their religion. At the time, it meant that Jews were allowed to reside there and to practice their religion.

<sup>5</sup> Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 23.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.<sup>7</sup>

This reflects the belief that Jews should have the rights that they were denied in the colonies and an assertion of the equality of Jews as “citizens of the United States of America.”<sup>8</sup> As has been extensively noted in American history, the ideals of the Revolution were not extended to all groups, in particular, African Americans. Yet, it seems they were extended to Jews. This was, at least partially, because of the networks of powerful elites that Jews had joined through the Masons. After all, when Moses Seixas delivered the letter from Yeshuat Israel to George Washington, he was also carrying a letter from a Masonic lodge. He was one representative sent for two organizations.

But why is this important? How do the connections that existed between Jews and Masons in early America help further the study of Masonry and the study of Jews in America, and what significance does this connection have for people today?

In regards to the future study of Masonry, this analysis reveals new interpretations of Masonic canon by looking at a subsection of their population. Masonry is such a large, expansive organization that attempts to study it often ignore more specific explorations of small details. However, because the focus of this thesis was so narrow, it allowed a more thorough examination and analysis of small details like Masonic symbolism and the role of the lodge in attracting members. This thesis is by no means a

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<sup>7</sup> George Washington, "George Washington's Letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport," Touro Synagogue, <http://www.tourosynagogue.org/index.php/history-learning/tsf-intro-menu/slom-scholarship/86-washington-letter> (accessed December 1, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



complete work, but, because it represents the perspective of an informed outsider, it may bring up some analyses that Masons have overlooked.

In addition, it adds a new dimension to the study of Masonry. Other works studying groups within Masonry have recently been released,<sup>9</sup> indicating that it may be a growing field of study. Masons are often studied as a group within society, but there are groups within that group which experienced Masonry very differently than others because of what their lives were like outside of a Masonic context. This study of a group within the Masonic fraternity adds to our understanding of early American Masons as well as what we know about early American society as a whole.

For future Jewish scholarship, this thesis contains an analysis of Jewish interaction in early America, a subject that is often overlooked in favor of other topics like political rights or economic success. Scholars note Jewish participation in organizations like the Masons, but don't often analyze them. Instead, it is used as evidence of class or Jewish participation in society. In addition, scholars of Jewish American history often contrast the relatively free system of interaction that was open to American Jews with some of the more limited systems in Europe. However, they too often overlook how Jewish interaction functions in specific organization and how the organizations that they participated in may have furthered their interactions by extending their networks.

Within the study of Jewish American history, particularly in the early period, the utilization of a Masonic perspective can also serve as a counterbalance to the societal forces that heavily influence other parts of colonial society. While Jews of the era often

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<sup>9</sup> For example, Peter P. Hinks and Stephen Kantrowitz's *All Men Free and Brethren: Essays on the History of African American Freemasonry*.

appear to be discriminated against for their religion, the relative unimportance of any religion in Masonry stands out. This shows the importance of context in history. It is likely that some of the Masons were part of the governmental organizations that denied Jews naturalization, yet, as brothers, their Masonic bonds transcended those differences. Jews used these networks to assert their equality, potentially allowing them to gain their political rights more quickly and without as much conflict.

Examining the relationships between Judaism and Freemasonry allows for more detailed analysis, revealing characterizations of both groups and introducing a new, more detailed topic of discussion. Both groups limit the relevant sources of the other, forcing intense scrutiny and educated speculation. This is a starting point which poses ideas which should be used by future scholars as theories to test and as questions to answer.

It is important to note that this is not a completely comprehensive source. There are things that the scope of my research was not able to address, especially because it is the first work, as far as I know, that attempts to understand this connection. This is merely the starting point for future scholarship. Questions of how “Jewish lodges” interacted with other, more Christian lodges, what the experience of Jewish Masons was like in non-urban or less Jewish areas (if it existed at all), and why lodges with Jews tend to attract large groups of them, would all be interesting and valuable questions that could come from some of the ideas that I have presented. While I have tried to address some of these issues to the best of my ability, there is more work to be done.

However, beyond a starting point for future scholarship, one might question the value of this work for the general population. What does this study tell us about the past and the human experience? As I have often found with the study of history, the study of

an individual group can be representative of the experience of another group. In America, Jews were not the only religious group that faced marginalization. In Charleston, South Carolina four Jews joined with Huguenots in 1697 to petition for the right of full citizenship. Even Catholics, a group that modern Americans rarely distinguish from other Christians, were discriminated against based on their religion.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the struggles of Jews to find a place in society, and the home that they found within Masonry, may be reflective of the experiences of other groups. Or, if, in fact, it was harder for Catholics to join a lodge than it was for Jews, that opens up an equally interesting set of questions. No matter what the specifics are, all groups have their stories of finding acceptance in an oppositional society. Thus, the story of Jews, and the acceptance that they found in Masonry, has themes that are universal.

The continued existences of both the American Jewish community and the organization of the Freemasons also allows for future topics of study and brings the relevance of this study into the present. In fact, in discussing my thesis with my family, I discovered that my maternal grandfather was a Mason. Of course, the American Jewish community, and probably the Masonic fraternity, are very different today than they were in the eighteenth century. However, by understanding the origins of this relationship and the foundation upon which it was built, modern Jewish Masons can better understand and appreciate their history and what allowed them to join the fraternity. Even non-Masonic Jews can appreciate this story as a part of their history, since it tells a new part of the story of the early American Jewish community.

The fact that, as a whole, the Masons were never explicitly opposed to Jewish membership makes them exceptional and, thus, worthy of study. With a study such as

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<sup>10</sup> Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000*, 23-4.

this one which breaks down the Masonic organization into different levels, the connections between organizations can be understood and appreciated more thoroughly. A detailed analysis reveals information about the goals of Jews and Masons, and what they valued that might not otherwise appear and that likely has applicability for a more diverse group. Thus, although narrow, the study of connections between Jews and Masonry is a story of the early American experience as a whole.

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